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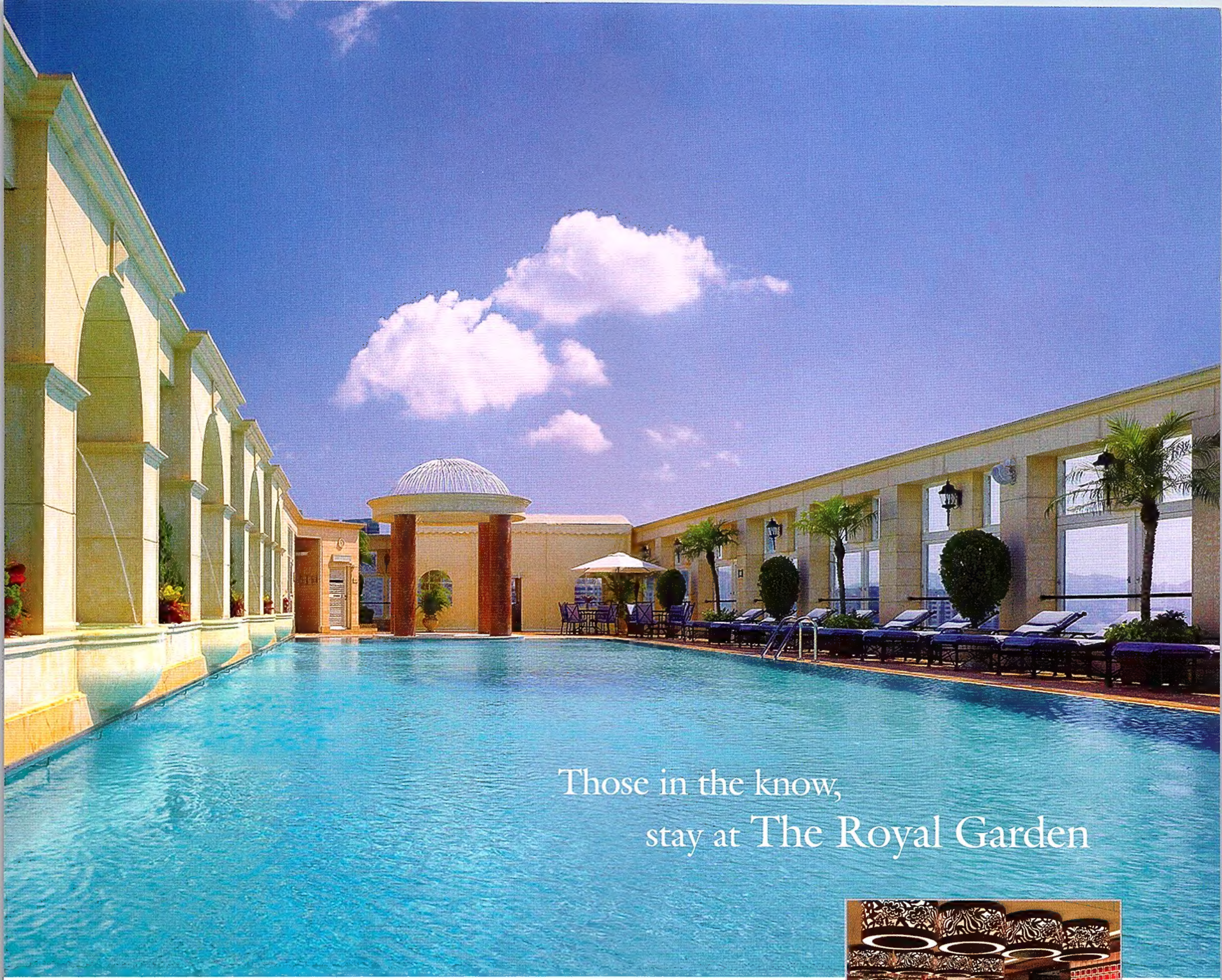

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Thanks to its geopgraphical situation, cross-border tourism has blossomed in Xishuangbanna in recent years. From here, travellers can visit Thailand by ship along the Lancang River or travel by land to Myanmar and Laos in South Asia.

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Relaxation is Vacation

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Apart from convenient transportation and excellent service, Holiday Inn Downtown Shanghai also leaves its guests with nice impression since each hotel staff is filled with a kind heart.

At the 1st Annual Corporate Reception of Save the Children UK in 2005, HRH the Princess Royal, Princess Anne presented the Save the Children Award for Distinguished and Meritorious Service and the Save the Children silver pin to Mr. Robin Rajpal, General Manager of Holiday Inn Downtown Shanghai in recognition of outstanding services to children, in that he has given invaluable support to Save the Children's work and, in particular, has achieved, significant fundraising results by encouraging his colleagues to support disabled children throughout China. Both excited and touched by such an honour, Mr. Rajpal has confirmed that he will double his efforts to raise fund for Helping Disabled Children in China in the future.

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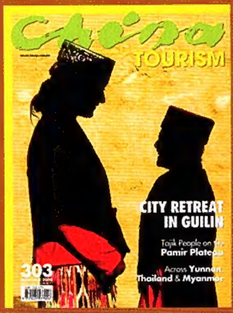
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Three Visits to Mt Sanqingshan

Photos & Article • Wong Chung Fai

The author visited Huangshan several times and is always deeply impressed by its beauty. Nevertheless, an unfortunate event a few years ago shifted his focus to Mt Sanqingshan.

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Pastoral migration was part of the Kazak tradition. People were climbing mountains and crossing rivers for the better part of the year.

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Tengzhou
Shandong Province

Perhaps history-honoured Tengzhou, a city located in Northeast China's Shandong Province, is unfamiliar to both Hong Kongers and foreigners, but it owns rich resources in natural landscapes, heritages and wetlands. It was also the cradle site of the Longshan* Culture, a late Neolithic culture characterized by a burnished black pottery.

Weishan Lake

One of the biggest fresh water bodies in North China, Weishan Lake had been a major battlefield of the Anti-Japanese War. It's about a 30-minute's drive from Tengzhou downtown. August is the best time to tour the lake, when the fishing season starts and water lilies are blossoming. Try a cruise on a wooden boat and taste the delicious local food.

1

2

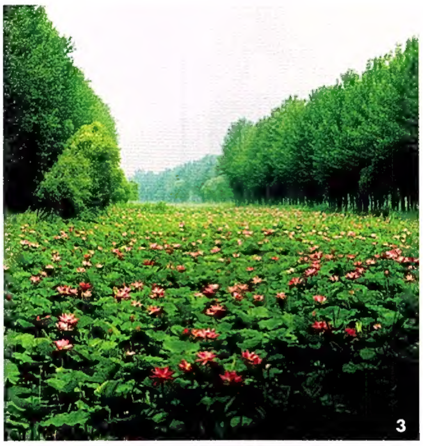
Travel Tips

Transportation: Fly to Jinan, capital city of Shandong Province. Then take a bus to Tengzhou, which takes about 3 hours and costs 55 yuan. Or take a train to Jinan Railway Station to Tengzhou. Fare: 30 yuan.

Accommodation: The Tengzhou Hotel, Xinyuan Hotel and Communications Hotel are equipped with better facilities. Rate of standard room: 200 yuan. If your tour to Weishan Lake, you may have to stay in fishermen's homes.

Weishanhu Wetlands' Red Lotus Scenic Area

It is the biggest and primitive wetland landscape in Northeast China, as well as the largest lotus-appreciation area in China. Every year from June to September, there will be gardens built in the theme of lotus flower, creating a fairy-like scenery. Tourists may also take a boat to Panlong Island, and have a panorama of the wetlands at the Panlong Pavilion.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Food of Tengzhou

The most famous local dish is mutton soup, especially the one made in Luzhai in the city area or Wulixiang restaurant in Xihuan Road. Another delicacy is deep-fried vegetables pastry. The pastry is a traditional snack in southwestern Shandong. It is made of Chinese chives, Chinese cabbage, cucumber, carrot, chili, pepper, Cummin fennel, and noodles made from bean or sweet potato. Besides, Zhang Wang Zhen brewed duck with Chinese herbs, "Shy fish balls", Tengzhou spicy soup, and Xigang spicy black fish are also must-try for diners.

Explore City's Heritages

The ruins of Beixing Culture are located in the highland area beside Xuehe River, north of Beixing Village in Guanqiao Town, Tengzhou. It was the earliest ruins of the New Stone Age discovered in the area of the Yellow River and Huaihe River in China. An exhibition hall built in the ruins exhibit the information about the live of human beings during that period.

Originally a Buddhist pagoda of Long Quan Temple, the thousand-year-old Long Quan (Dragon Pond) Ancient Pagoda is a symbolic building of Tengzhou. The temple, however, was destroyed through time and wars in the past.

Other places of historical interests are Memorial Hall of Mo Zi (468—376 B.C., founder of the Mojia School, one of the most famous philosophers during the early Warring States Period), Wang Xuezhong Art Gallery, and Exhibition Hall of Stones and Statues of Han Dynasty.

* Longshan, or Dragon Mountain, is located in Shandong Province.

1. Fishermen on Weishan Lake
2. Weishan Lake is a famous spot of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal
3. The Red Lotus Scenic Area in Weishan Lake Wetlands
4. A hotel in Tengzhou (courtesy of Gao Jie)

4

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Realize Your Dreams

Through Travel

Travelling can be one of the best ways to realize our fondest dreams.

Guilin in Southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is one of the most tourist-friendly and relaxing Chinese cities, where Eastern and Western cultures mix perfectly and peacefully. Through repeated visits, our reporters have experienced enough to introduce the best times and locations to visit and take excellent pictures of the area. More importantly, they share with us stories of the many foreigners who have settled there: building families, running hotels, teaching English. These people came to the city as visitors, but now regard Guilin as their home.

If you want to learn more about China's minority ethnic groups, consider a trip to Xishuangbanna in West China's Yunnan Province. From there you may also explore the country's southwest border with neighbouring countries Thailand and Myanmar. And if you are lucky enough, you might even be welcomed into one of their tribes!

For a group of elderly women from Northeast China's Shandong Province, a visit to such a commercialized city as Beijing is the most memorable adventure of their lives. It's an especially poignant journey as they are from the last generations to have their feet bound. After seeing the Forbidden City, one of them said she could now die happy.

Whatever your dream may be, we hope someday and somehow you may realize it in a place called China.

(by Zhang Liping)

THE WORLD OF INTERIORS
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May 1 ~ 6 **Hong Kong**

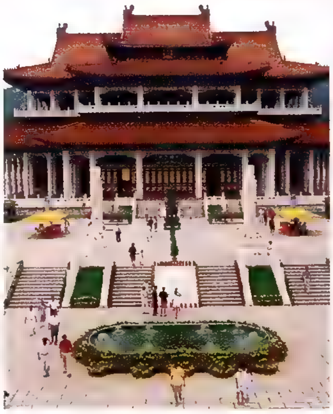
Cheung Chau Bun Festival

The highlight processions will take place on May 5 and 6, a time when residents in the town all seem squeeze into the little island. The parade involves lion dancers and colourful figures dressed up as deities. Of course, the must-sees are elaborately-dressed young children held aloft and appearing to float above the crowds as the procession makes its way to a temple where giant towers covered in sweet buns stand like sentinels. Following last year's practice, at midnight, competitors clamber up the towers to grab the "luckiest" buns off the top. To ensure a good angle and comparatively comfortable environment to picture the event, remember to take the boat to the island earlier.

May 26 ~ Jun 2 **Liaoning**

3rd China Forest Tourism Expo, Anshan

Anshan, the third largest city of Liaoning, boasts a rich tourism resource with 48 percent of its area covered by forest. The expo is designed to boost the growth of forest tourism, as well as to improve the general public's awareness of forest protection. The eight-day event will include a series of activities, such as a large exhibition on the national forest scenery resources, a forest tourism investment fair and a forum on the construction of forest parks and the development of forest tourism.



2006

MAY/JUN

June **Jiangsu**

Lotus Festival at Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou

Located in the heart of the water town of Jiangsu, the Humble Administrator's Garden covers 51,950 square metres. Every year in June to July, the Lotus Festival are held in the garden to enhance its beauty and elegance of garden. Entrance fee: 70 yuan; opening hours: 07:30 ~ 17:30

Jun 2 ~ 3 **Guangxi**

3rd Nanning Int'l Dragon Boat Tournament

Held in the capital city of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the tournament is expected to draw about 1, 000 racers from China, Australia and some ASEAN nations. With a long history, dragon boat racing is one of the traditional sports in China. In 2005, 34 teams with more than 900 players participated in the 2nd Nanning Dragon Boat Tournament.

Jun 8 ~ 12 **Zhejiang**

China Int'l Consumer Goods Fair, Ningbo

An important event for Ningbo, a beautiful foreign trade harbour city in Zhejiang Province. The fair will set up 3,000 booths, consisting of five exhibiting sections: household textiles and garments, electronics and home appliances, light industrial products, arts and crafts, and foodstuffs. Well-known enterprises, famous brands and new products from home and abroad will attend the fair. Venue: Ningbo International Convention & Exhibition Centre

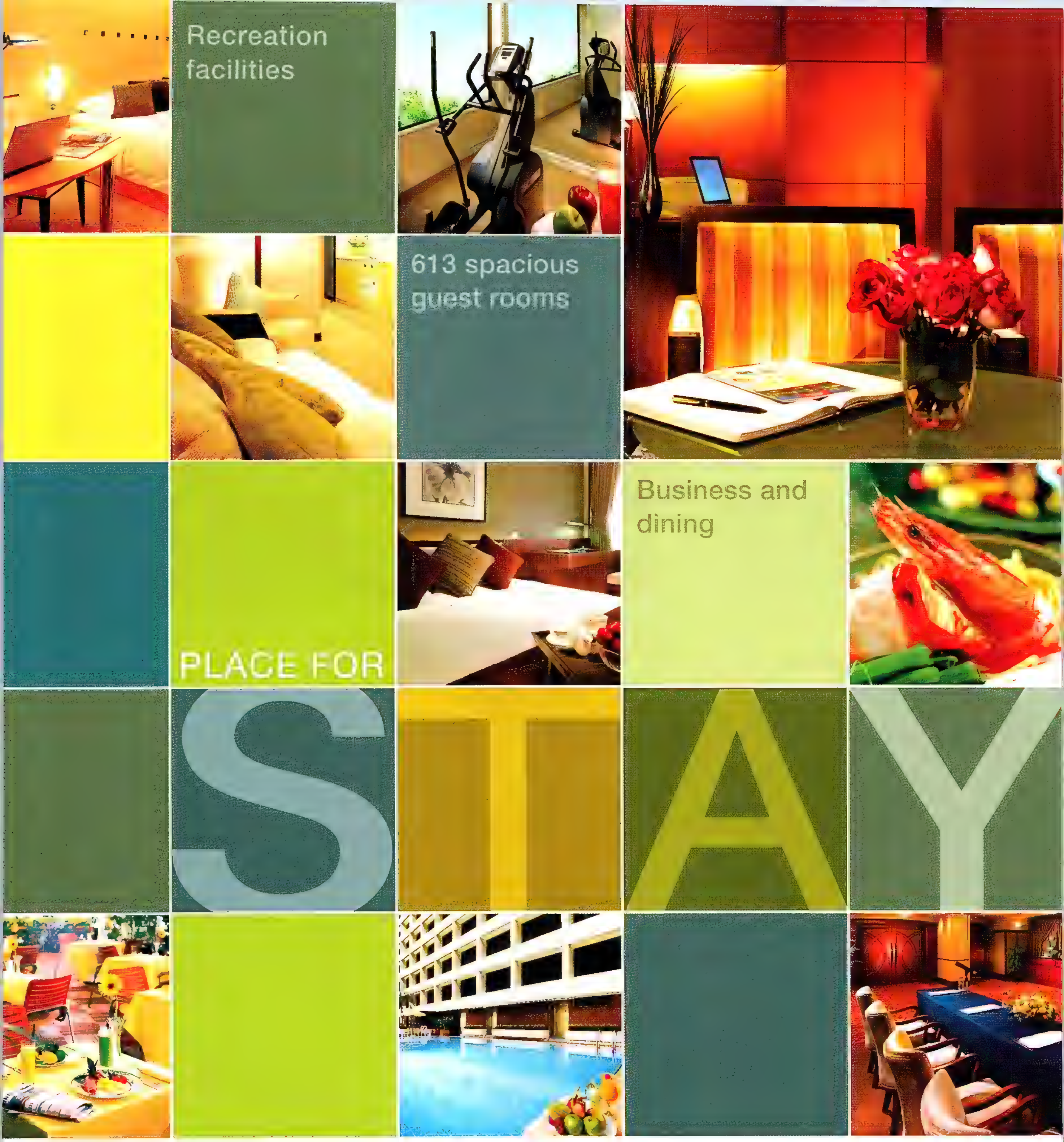
Website: www.cicgf.com/en/index.php

Apr 30, May 3 & 6 **Shanghai**

Music & Fireworks Competition

Want to see a more captivating "Pearl of the Orient"? Don't miss the annual music & fireworks event in the town. The competition will be held during the Labour Day holiday at Daning Park, Zhabei District in Shanghai. A fireworks company from Liuyang City in Hunan Province will represent China in the competition against the United States, France, Italy, England, and Spain. The team from England will use seven famous pieces of music to match the firecrackers to compose a folktale, while the Italian team will create a 20-metre-tall wall with fireworks.

Tickets (for two shows): 180 or 280 yuan.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HONG KONG

Maglev Extension to Link Airports

Shanghai's two airports could soon be linked by a maglev train line, if the Central Government approves the project. The city also plans to build two highways linking the Pudong International Airport with downtown Shanghai and Jinshan District.

Travellers will only take about 15 minutes to commute between the two airports, which are about 40 km apart. The maglev will extend from the Longyang Road Metro Station to the Hongqiao Airport with stops at the World Expo site and the Shanghai South Railway Station.

The city is also planning to extend the Maglev line to Hangzhou, capital city of Zhejiang Province in the future. Besides, the Shanghai Airport Authority announced plans to build two expressways linked to Pudong International Airport.

Guangzhou to Install Cameras in Public Place

Guangzhou will install "electronic eyes" in streets, public places, mass transit systems and roads that are high crime black spots. A citywide video surveillance system with 250,000 video monitors will be built and renovated to ensure public security in the city in the next two years, thus residents will have one more "bodyguard".

The system will cover all public places, major streets, critical departments, key spots, places with large crowds, mass transit systems, city gateways, communities and residential blocks over entire Guangzhou. The material captured on video monitors would be kept in strict confidence and not be released to the public.

Qinghai-Tibet Railway Expected to Extend

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway, which will begin its trial runs this July, is expected to be further extended from Lhasa, capital of Tibet Autonomous Region, to Xigazê City in the southwestern part of the region.

The projected section between Lhasa and Xigazê is expected to be completed in the period of the 11th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2006—2010).

Hotels to Become Environmentally Friendly

China is set to have 10,000 environmentally friendly hotels by 2010 as part of effort to improve ecological awareness in the hospitality industry. These hotels were expected to be guided to set up eco-friendly managerial systems and facilities and adopt technologies that conserve water and energy and reduce waste.

There are currently more than 300 hotels that have come under the classification. But some existing energy-saving techniques were not feasible in the hospitality industry, such as using recycled water. It may require a huge investment to dig holes throughout the hotel buildings to install new pipes.

High-speed Rail Links Approved

A high-speed rail link between Beijing and Shanghai has been approved by the State Council. A limited company, private or foreign investments, will also be established, which will be responsible for building and operating the 1,320-km line.

Designed for speeds of 300 km per hour, with the maximum at 350 km per hour, the railway is expected to shorten travel time between the two cities from 13 to less than five hours, and also to significantly boost transport capacity and economic development.

Shaanxi to Build More Expressways in Next 15 Years

Northwest China's Shaanxi Province will have 5,000 km of expressways in the next 15 years as part of the construction of a safe, efficient and convenient transport network.

With the first expressway built in 1990, the total expressway mileage in Shaanxi has reached 1,302 km by the end of 2005. In the program, 3,500 km will be national expressways and 1,500 km will be provincial ones.

Tibet's Largest Hydropower Project to Operate

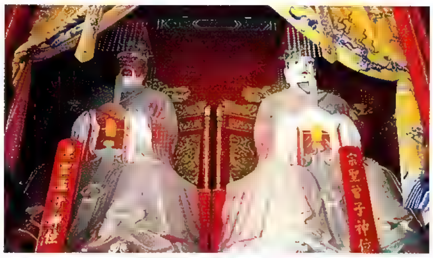
The first generating unit in a 100,000-kW hydropower project in Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region is expected to go in operation and go on stream late in 2006.

The hydropower plant, with four generating units, each with a capacity of 25,000 kW, started construction in May 2003. The project has 80 percent of its 1.34 billion yuan (about US$165 million) investment from state coffers. Apart from power generation, the hydropower project will also have a role to play in flood control and irrigation.

Forestation Plan for Olympic Green Park

Beijing recently aims to focus on the environment around its sports venues. Major forestation efforts will be made in the Olympic Green, a theme park specially created for the anticipated event, around sports venues, and along roads that connect the venues and downtown.

It is estimated that around 9,000 hectares of bare land in Beijing will be covered with trees after this spring. Efforts will also be made in building a "green wall" to rein in the sandstorm menace that chokes the city every spring.



Memorial Rituals for Confucius to Be Held

Memorial rituals for Confucius (551—479 B.C.), a great thinker and educator in ancient China, will be held on the 28th day of each month from April to October in his hometown of Qufu in Northeast China's Shandong Province, aiming at entertaining domestic and overseas tourists who want to appreciate the memorial activities for Confucius.

The monthly activities are a simplified version of the grand ceremony held on Sept. 28, the birthday of Confucius, when people dressed in traditional ancient costumes perform the rituals which had been held in the early Qing Dynasty (1644—1911).

New Vehicles for Three Gorges Dam Tour

Upon completion of the top of the Three Gorges Dam in this May, domestic and foreign tourists can appreciate the scene around the dam in the new environment friendly sight-seeing vehicles. The first 12 vehicles of this kind will be put into operation in October this year.

The vehicles will be made of glass from the top to the seat so as to maximize view available for tourists. Tourists can also enjoy high definition tourism programs of the Three Gorges Dam. These programs will be interpreted simultaneously in six languages for both domestic and foreign tourists.

Hong Kong's First Prison to Become Tourist Attraction

Hong Kong's first prison, Victoria Prison, will be redeveloped into a tourist attraction after decommissioning.

Victoria Prison, a landmark structure built in 1841, has seen Hong Kong's 160 odd years of development. Together with the adjoining Central Police Station and the Central Magistracy, it was the centre of Hong Kong's criminal justice system in the early years. The prison was used to accommodate felons such as pirates and bandits during the early years. When the Japanese army occupied Hong Kong during the Second World War, most of its building were destroyed. After the end of the war, the cluster of buildings were repaired and reopened as a prison.

Wangwu to Target World Geopark Title

The city government of Jiyuan, Central China's Henan Province, where the Wangwu Mountain National Geopark is located, has plans to apply for world geopark status for the park. The national geopark is composed of four park areas: the Tiantan Mountain (Heavenly Temple Mountain), Heilong (Black Dragon) Gorge, the Three Gorges of the Yellow River, and the Wulong (Five Dragons) Estuary, with a total area of 1,170 sq km and a core area of 463 sq km.

Wangwu Mountain is known for its marvelous geological structure and landscape as well as its charming scenery and sites of human interest. The Wangwu Mountain Geological Museum built in 2004 in line with national geopark standards is now undergoing improvement.

Mother's Day Brunch at Xing Guo Hotel

The Cafe Li Brasserie at Shanghai's Radisson Plaza Xing Guo Hotel will host Mother's Day Sunday Brunch at RMB288+15% per person including free flow of soft drinks and a glass of Veuve Clicquot, nice gifts and beautiful flowers are also included. Do not miss this opportunity to express your thanks to your mother.

Mothers in a party four paying guests can receive 50% discount.

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Hong Kong

More Cities for Solo Tours

China's Premier Wen Jiabao has announced that five more cities will open to individual travel program to Hong Kong starting this May. Presently, 38 mainland cities have already joined the scheme.

The mainland has forged a closer economic partnership with Hong Kong over the past few years, adding that some infrastructural facilities linking Hong Kong and the mainland are under construction of some others is being stepped up. Noting that Hong Kong has become the fourth largest trade partner of the mainland, the mainland has so far opened 27 service and trade sectors to Hong Kong covering finance, accounting and legal affairs in a bid to give more convenient market access to Hong Kong companies. Website of Solo Tour HK: www.solotour.com.hk/

Travel

62 New National Forest Parks

The State Forestry Administration (SFA) has recently approved 62 new national forest parks across the country to protect natural resources and boost tourism. With the new parks, the total number of national forest parks in China now come to 627, covering an area of more than 11 million hectares.

The SFA requires an overall plan for each park. No permanent construction project can start before the plans are approved. The forest parks receive more than 100 million tourists annually, providing tourism revenue of more than 100 billion yuan (US$12.5 billion).

Inner Mongolia

Afforestation Project Enjoys Good Results

Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in North China has planted 1.47 million hectares of trees over the past six years to help reduce the threat of sandstorm to the major Chinese cities Beijing and Tianjin. Launched in 2000, the afforestation project covers 458,000 sq km in total, and covers 31 banners and counties in Inner Mongolia alone.

The afforestation project has greatly improved local environment and slowed down the deterioration in pastures and desertification in the project areas in the Xilin Gol League. The forest and grassland coverage rate has increased to the current 50 percent from 20 percent before 2000 in the project area. Local farmers and herdsmen also benefited a lot from the afforestation project, with their per capita income highly increased.

Shanghai

China's First Wind Power Museum Opens

Located at the gate of the Shanghai Binhai Forest Park in coastal Nanhui District, Shanghai Wind Power Museum, the first of its kind in China, has now opened to the public.

The museum is one of 40 science museums planned to be built before 2010. It will be open to primary and middle school students as extracurricular activity venues. The two-story museum is made up of four exhibition halls including wind-driven power generation and the relationship between wind power and people.

A three-dimensional projection screen showing an interactive cartoon about science, and various wind power machines are also exhibited, including the oldest windmill in the early 14th century in Holland and the state-of-the-art machines which are widely used today.

Hong Kong

Lamma Fisher Folks Village Opens

Occupying an area over 2,000 square metres, Lamma Fisher Folk's Village showcases the local fishermen culture and the history of fishery industry in Hong Kong. The village comprises authentic fishing junk and sampan, contemporary fishing boat models, fishing rafts and dwellings, as well as an open-air dragon boat serving the tourists. Visitors can participate and experience some of the daily fisher folk activities, such as repairing fish net, feeding the fish, producing a salted fish and fishing on rafts, or even learning how to fix a fish boat.

Location: Sok Kwu Wan, Lamma Island, HK   Opening hours: 10:00 ~ sunset
Admission fees: Adult HK$40, Children under 12 or elderly over 65 HK$30,
One-day pass HK$60
Hotline: 852- 2982 8585   Fax: 852-2982 8589
Website: www.fisherfolks.hk (Chinese version only)

Hong Kong

"Ngong Ping 360" - The Town's Latest Tourist Attraction

Hong Kong's newest tourism attraction, Ngong Ping 360, combines a spectacular journey aboard a 5.7-km aerial cableway to the Tin Tan Buddha Statue on Lantau Island with an impressive cultural themed village and breathtaking panoramic views over Hong Kong. The site will be officially opened at the end of June 2006.

It offers fully-equipped meeting venues, a choice of Chinese or international cuisine, tea ceremonies at the Ngong Ping Tea House, as well as entertaining specially created cultural shows and unique shopping opportunities. Events at Ngong Ping Village will be tailored to include creative outdoor and indoor activities, street performances and cultural shows, and can be further enhanced by incorporating the entertaining attractions at the village: Walking With Buddha and Monkey's Tale Theatre. The area is also ideal for spectacular evening functions — from A-list parties to product launches — and special events such as wedding can be created

Within easy access to the international airport and Hong Kong's Central business district, Ngong Ping 360 is predicted to become one of Hong Kong's "must-go" attractions. The cableway is managed by Skyrail-ITM (Hong Kong) Ltd, whose Australian parent company is one of the most experienced cable-car operators in the world, with operations including the world-famous Skyrail Rainforest Cableway in Cairns and SkySafari cableway at Sydney's Taronga Zoo.

Transport

Tunnel for Asia-Europe Land Bridge Opens

The Wushaoling Tunnel Railway, the longest of its kind in Asia has opened to traffic in late March in northwestern China's Gansu Province.

The 21.05-km-long tunnel railway, which is more than 2,400 metres above sea level, is a key project for the Asia-Europe Land Bridge's 3,651-km-long section from Lianyungang in East China's Jiangsu Province to Urümqi in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Designed to allow speeds of 160 km per hour, the tunnel railway has shortened the distance between Dacaigou and Longgou, part of the long section, by 30.4 km. Another line will be opened in this October. They will provide a significant boost for transportation between China's east and west regions.

The operation of the tunnel railway will also help ease the cargo and passenger transportation pressure on the Asia-Europe Land Bridge, the cheapest and fastest Asia-Europe land rail route, which starts from Lianyungang and goes westward to its terminal at the Port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

Aviation

Airlines Joins Shanghai World Expo

The partnership authorizes China Eastern Airlines (MU), one of the country's biggest airlines, to provide funding and passenger flight services for the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. The deal also marked the formal start of a marketing campaign covering sponsorships, licensing and commercial services at venues of the Shanghai World Expo.

The China Eastern is the first partner of the Shanghai World Expo. To be held between May 1 and October 31, 2010, the Shanghai World Expos is expected to draw 70 million visitors from home and abroad.

Macau / Brazil

Visa-free Access Starts

The MSAR and Brazil have started to offer each other visa-free access for a maximum stay of 90 days with effective since March 24, 2006. There are currently 69 countries and territories having agreed to grant visa-free access or visa-on-arrival to MSAR passport holders.

China / Poland

Set Up of Cultural Centres

Visiting Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Meller has confirmed that Poland and China have agreed to set up cultural centres in both countries to promote understanding between the two peoples and bilateral cooperation. Poland is interested in China's technologies, and it also hopes Chinese companies would invest in Poland and cooperate with Polish enterprises. China is Poland's most important partner in Asia, the foreign minister hopes that his current visit would further enhance bilateral exchanges in various fields and push forward contact, in particular, between the youth of both countries.

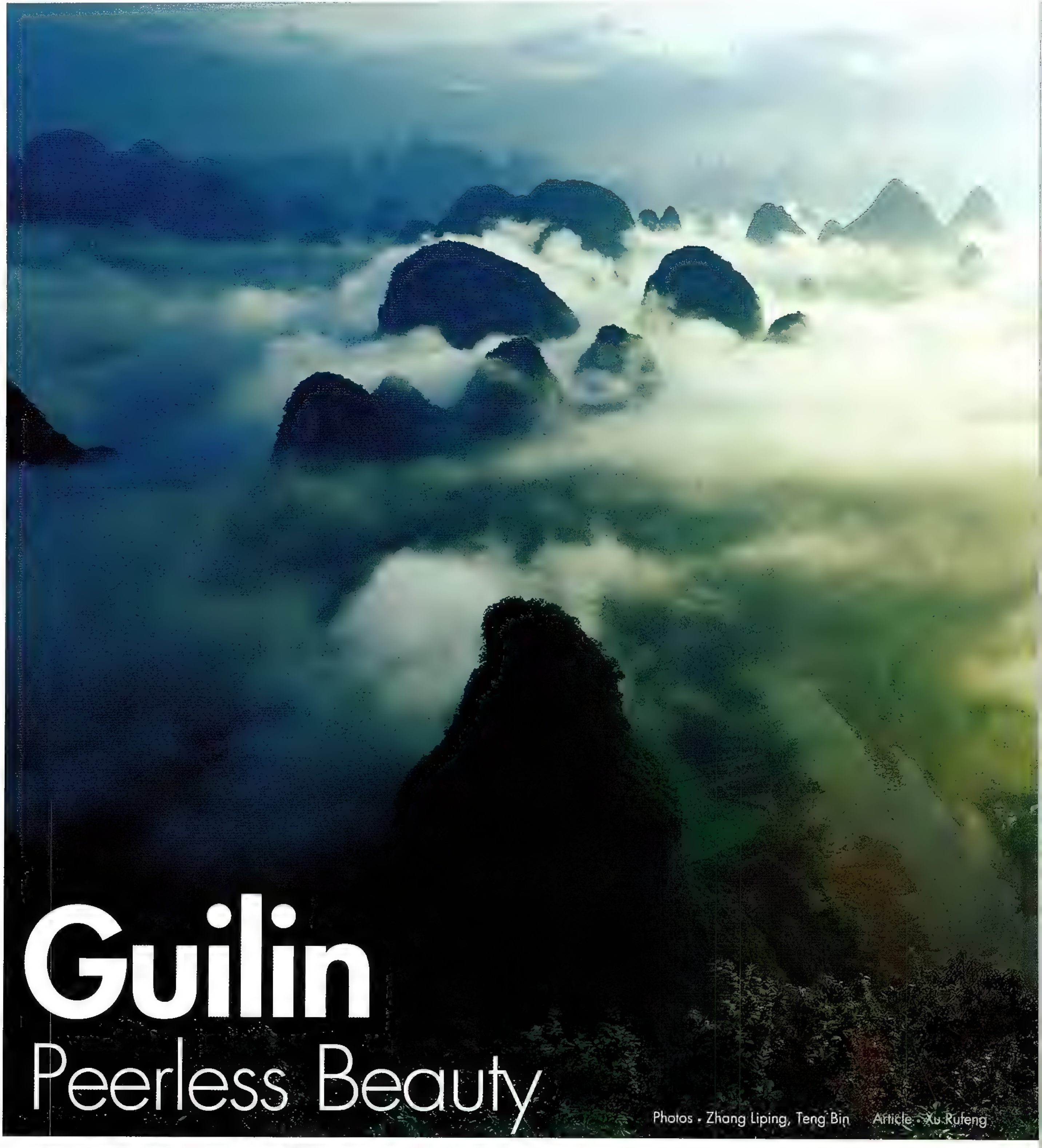
Travel

Top 50 Chinese Tourist Spots for Foreigners

Fifty tourist sites, including the Forbidden City, Qomolangma Peak and the Sun Moon Lake in Taiwan, have been chosen as the "Top 50 Chinese Destinations for Foreigners" according to the results of a public poll recently.

Jointly conducted by Beijing-based Global Travel Newspaper and 31 metropolitan newspapers, the poll started in early March. About 170 sites in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities were listed for voting.

Tourists at Forbidden City



Guilin

Peerless Beauty

Photos · Zhang Liping, Teng Bin   Article · Xu Rufeng

The scenery of Guilin has been lauded both at home and abroad for years. My greatest concern, however, was whether years of rapid tourist development and an endless stream of visitors had ruined Guilin's beautiful landscapes. Had it simply become a noisy, profitable "theme" park?

No, thank goodness, with particular thanks to the Guilin people. When I

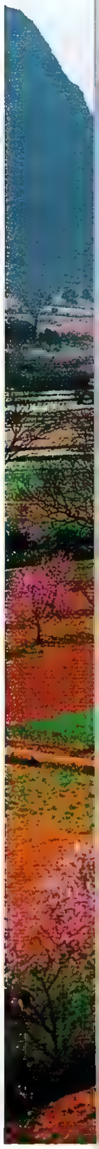
Mist shrouded Lijiang River (by Teng Bin)

revisited recently I was reassured to see that, despite the growth of the local tourism industry over the years, the landscape was no less charming, the locals were as simple and hospitable as before, and the sweet songs of Sanjie (Third Sister) Liu could still be heard along the Lijiang River.

I eased into the still gentle pace of life there and found it hard to leave.

With the Putao (Grape) Township down below, there is surprisingly a vast expanse of fields in the landscape of Guilin. (by Zhang Liping)

No dragon can be seen at Yulong (Dragon-Encountering) River. It looks rather like a landscape painting. (by Zhang Liping)



A colourful land of charming peach blossom. (by Zhang Liping)

The Xingping Town by the Lijiang River enveloped in mist. (by Zhang Liping)

Landscape of Qifeng Town

1 Landscape of Qifeng Town

The Dongshan (Eastern Hill) Village, about 10 km southeast of the Guilin City proper, has beautiful rural landscape with imposing mountains.

[illegible] Take Bus No. 4 from Guilin Railway Station to the terminus. Pass Li Xiangqun Primary School after getting off the bus, then walk straight for 400 metres into Dongshan Village before taking pictures.

Photo Shooting Beautiful sceneries are available in all seasons, the rural landscape of ploughing in spring, the green rice fields under blue sky and white clouds in summer, the golden rice waves in autumn, the morning mist or snow in winter. As a garrison is stationed in Qifeng (Strange Peak) Town, there are some forbidden military areas.

Camera Horseman SW612 (65mm lens) Aperture: 16; Speed: 1/30 second.

2 Scenery of Yangdi

Located 57 km southeast of the Guilin City proper, Yangdi is under the jurisdiction of the Yangshuo County. Surrounded by erect green hills, cottages scattered amid green farmland along the river. Seen from above, the landscape is especially spectacular with the ribbon of Lijiang River flowing beside Yangdi.

[illegible] If going from Guilin, take a minibus from Guilin Railway Station to Yangshuo, and get off at Yangdi Intersection. Then change a bus there to Yangdi . The Yangshuo County Bus Terminal also has bus going directly to Yangdi

[illegible] There is a big slope before Yangdi. Ask the driver to stop the car before heading down the slope. A hike up the hill along the path to the right of the road for about 20 minutes will take you to the transmitting tower on the hill.

Tips Make sure that it is safe because the space for screening is rather narrow on the hill with steep cliff down below. Better come in a group of three to five people.

Camera Horseman SW612 (65mm lens); Aperture: 32; Speed: 1/30 second (with polariscope)

Best season June ~ September, in the afternoon

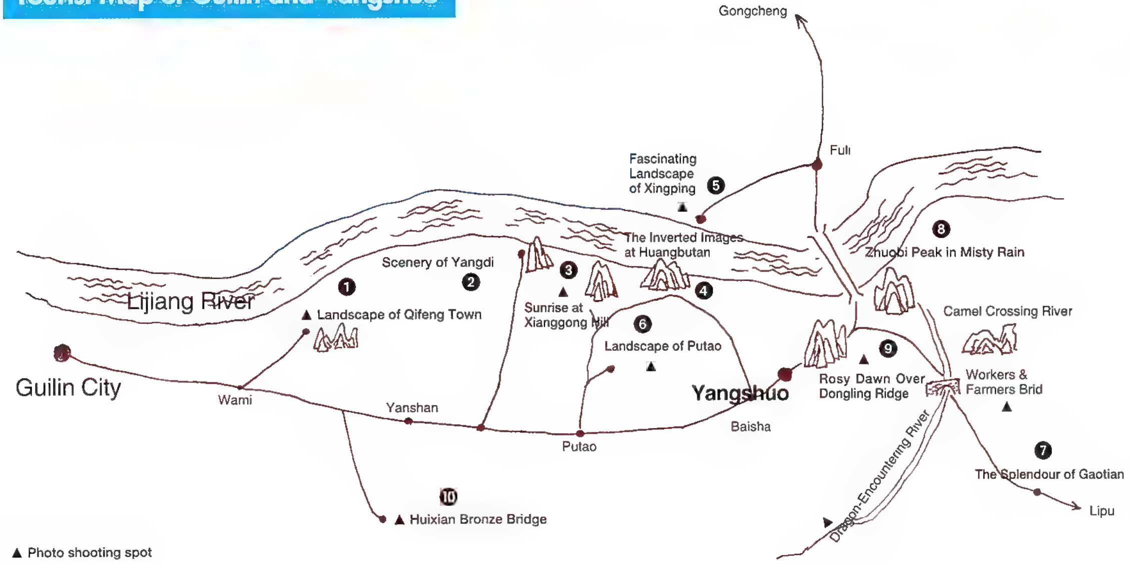
10 Best Views in Yangshuo

Photos & Article • Teng Bin

Editor's note: There must be many landscape pictures taken from Guilin and many people may have done so. Yet it is not easy to find a good perspective. What we see are mostly familiar sights with similar approaches. Having spent over a decade or so in Guilin, our correspondent, Mr. Teng Bin has covered almost every part of the area and is here to tell us the best perspectives for photographing 10 major scenic spots in Guilin and Yangshuo.

Scenery of Yangdi

Tourist Map of Guilin and Yangshuo


Gongcheng
Fuli
Fascinating Landscape of Xingping ❺
❽ Zhuobi Peak in Misty Rain
The Inverted Images at Huangbutan ❹
Scenery of Yangdi ❷
❸ Sunrise at Xianggong Hill
❶ Landscape of Qifeng Town
Lijiang River
❻ Landscape of Putao
Camel Crossing River
Guilin City
Wami
Yanshan
Putao
Yangshuo
Baisha
❾ Rosy Dawn Over Dongling Ridge
Workers & Farmers Brid
❼ The Splendour of Gaotian
Lipu
Dragon-Encountering River
❿ Huixian Bronze Bridge
▲ Photo shooting spot

Sunrise at Xianggong Hill

3 Sunrise at Xianggong Hill

Xianggong Hill is on the west side of the Lijiang River between Huangbutan (Yellow Cloth Shoal) Scenic Area and Jiu Ma Hua Shan (Nine Horses Drawing Hill). Looking afar on the mountain, you can see the river winding along a range of peaks. The sea of clouds, sunrise and rosy clouds have attracted numerous shutterbugs and given rise to some awarded works.

Getting there Located in Xingping Township of Yangshuo County, the Xianggong Hill is about 28 km from Yangshuo and 57 km from Guilin, accessible by land and water routes. Take a bus from Yangshuo or Guilin and get off at Putao or Baisha (White Sand). Then rent a car (or motor-taxi) to reach the foot of the mountain. The water route starts from Xingping where you can rent a boat, via Huangbutan to reach the mountain. Then hike up to the top.

[illegible] Early morning is usually the best time to screen Xianggong Hill, so you need to be on top of the mountain before dawn to photograph the sunrise, sea clouds and rosy clouds.

Tips Safety is the priority up the mountain and a flashlight is necessary. In the Hebaoshan (Purse Hill) Village there is a villager named Zhao Qiaoyang who has a family inn for board and room. The cost is 50 yuan for a standard room, and 15 yuan/ person.

Tel (773) 870 6826; The phone number of the Village Committee is (773) 870 5093.

Camera Horseman SW612 (65mm lens); Aperture: 32; Speed: 1/60 second

Best season April ~ November

The Inverted Images at Hu[illegible]

4 The Inverted Images at Huangbutan

As one of the most charming places along the Lijiang River, The surface of the river in this section is calm, wide and smooth, making the inverted images clear and enthralling. It is all the more poetic and picturesque with some fishing boats.

[illegible] g there Rent a boat from the Xingping Dock (about 100 yuan); or rent a car from Xingping to Yangjia Village by the Lijiang River. Then change to a bamboo raft to across the river for screening from the other side of the river.

[illegible] You can shoot the morning mist and rosy clouds early in the morning in counterlight; and get pictures of the misty Lijiang River in spring. After a makeover by the villagers, 2 yuan a person is charged for the shooting site.

Tips Since the water is calm as a mirror at Huangbutan, you can rent one or two bamboo rafts (about 30 yuan each) when renting a boat to make the composition of your picture more beautiful.

[illegible] Nikon F100 (AF24 ~ 85mm lens); Aperture: 8; Speed: 1/30 second

[illegible] April ~ October

Fascinating landscape of Xingping

5 Fascinating Landscape of Xingping

[illegible] Only 25 km from the Yangshuo County Town, Xingping is easily accessible with many regular buses to and from the county town (5.5 yuan/ person).

Accommodation As there are so many nice views around Xingping, the landscape photographers usually need to find lodging and wait for the best weather, It is easy to find a small hostel from among many in the town. Here are two of them that are convenient for photographers. One is Wangjianglou Hotel, whose owner is named Zhou Qinsi. He is quite familiar with the scenic spots around Xingping as well as the routes for photographers along the Lijiang River. The hotel normally charging 50 yuan for a standard room. Tel: (773) 870 2276, 133 4756 1228

Another one is named Cuiyuan Family Inn, its owner named Huang Xingyue. He used to be a boatman and is quite familiar with the nice spots in Xingping and along the Lijiang River, also ready to provide help as to the routes to the camera sites. Tel: (773) 870 2462. A standard room is normally charged for about 50 yuan.

Photo shooting Xingping Hotel is presently the highest building in the town, and the best location for taking a panoramic picture of Xingping Town. You can shoot rosy clouds in the evening.

[illegible] Horseman SW612 (65mm lens); Aperture: 32; Speed: 1/30 second (with polariscope)

[illegible] May ~ October

6 Landscape at Putao

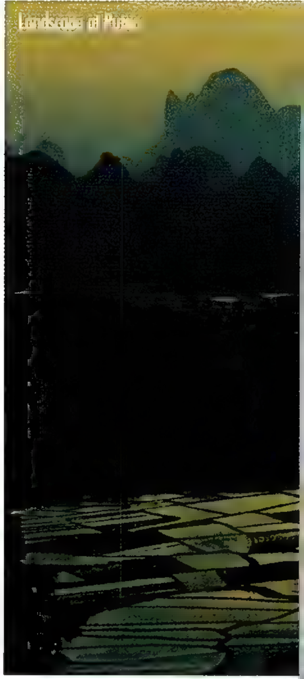
Putao Township in Yangshuo County is 44 km from Guilin and 16 km from Yangshuo, with a highway between the two places running north to south through the township. To the east of the township government is a large stretch of paddy rice fields. Every year before spring ploughing, pieces of paddy fields lie one after another in a way like a huge piece of well-designed brocade, glistening especially under the setting sun, against a background of a chain of mountains. This is a golden time for photographers.

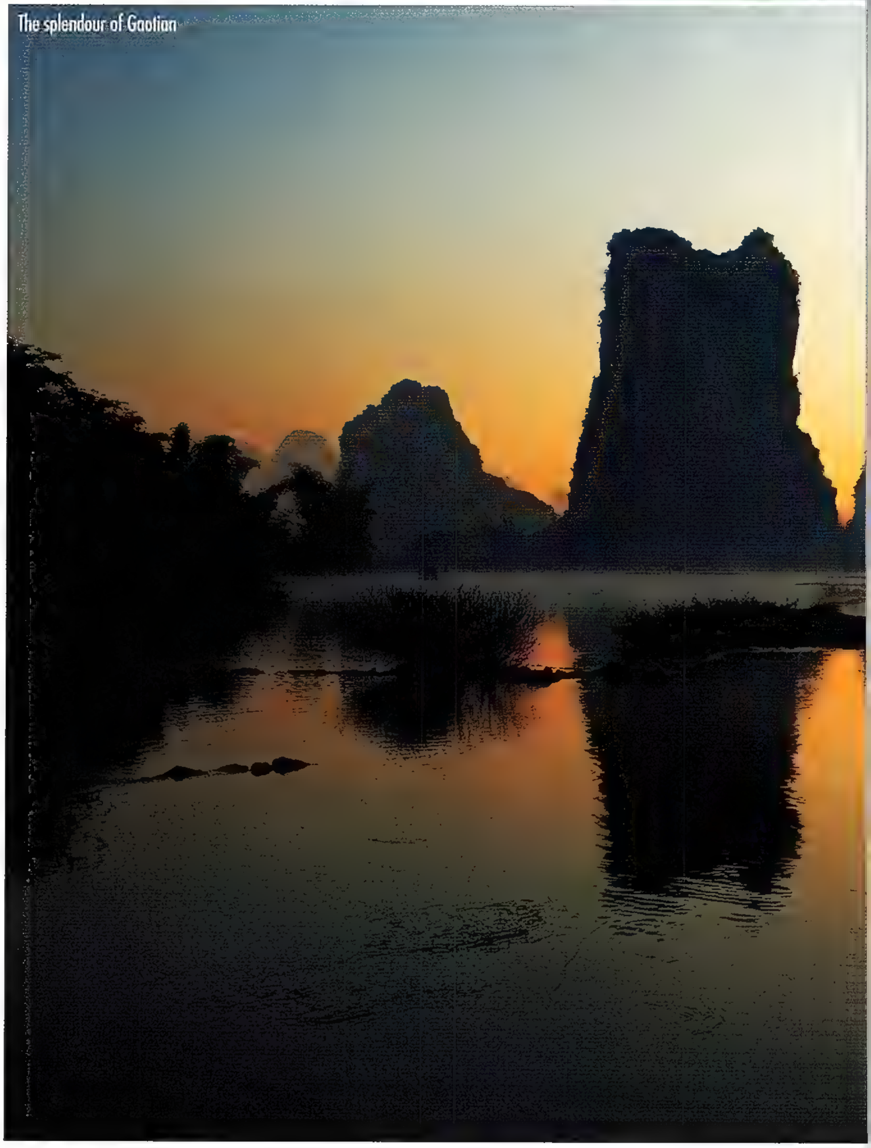
Getting there Take a shuttle bus from the Guilin Railway Station to Yangshuo, or take a bus from the Yangshuo Bus Station to Guilin, and get off at Putao (6 yuan from Guilin, 5 yuan from Yangshuo). At the crossing to the west marked "To Daping," get on a motorcycle taxi and ride westward for about 1.8 km, and get off at the first branch road when passing a village. Then walk to the left for about 20 metres before hiking up the mountain. There is a path leading up to the left side of the mountain top.

Photo Shooting Most of the pictures of Putao landscape were taken in counterlight. Choose a sunny day and get on the mountain top at around 4 ~ 5 in the afternoon to wait for the best time.

Camera Nikon D100 (AF24 ~ 85mm lens); Aperture: 22; Speed: 1/60 second

Best season April ~ May


Landscape at Putao


The splendour of Gaotian

7 The Splendour of Gaotian

Gaotian is located in the Yueliang (Moon) Hill scenic area in Gaotian Township, Yangshuo County. The Jinbao River, Yulong River, both branches of the Lijiang River, merge here as the Tianjia River and flow back into the Lijiang River. The landscape here is fabulous, with stretches of green paddy fields embraced by chains of hills, the lushly covered hills reflected in the glistering water.

[illegible] Take a bus at the Yangshuo Bus Station to Gaotian or Lipu, and get off at Gongnong (Workers and Farmers) Bridge (about 8 km from the county town). It can also be reached by renting a motor tricycle or bike from the county town.

[illegible] You can have a fairly large range of selections of the landscape in Gaotian: Take the sunrise, morning glow, or the azure sky and white clouds in frontlighting eastward from the Gongnong Bridge, or go under the bridge to select a good spot along the banks of the Tianjia River.

[illegible] Horseman SW612 (65mm lens); Aperture: 16; Speed: 1/15 second

[illegible] May ~ December

8 Zhuobi Peak in Misty Rain

Standing by the Lijiang River southeast of the Yangshuo County Town, Zhuobi Peak got its name from its pen-shaped appearance: a round bottom with the top pointed to the sky.

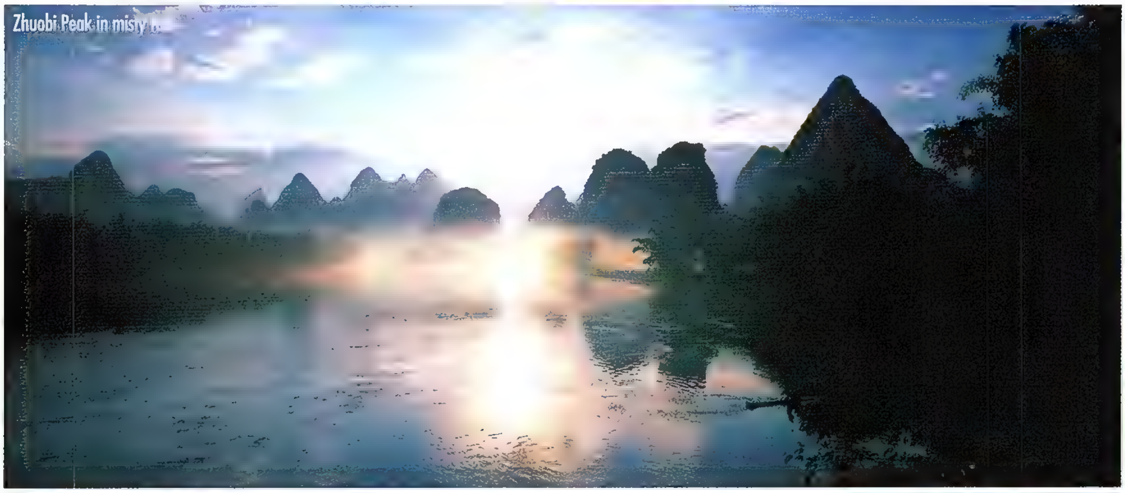
[illegible] The camera site is on the Yangshuo Bridge, some 1.5 km south of the Yangshuo County Town, and can be reached by walk or taxi from the town.

[illegible] The best location for having a distant view of Zhuobi Peak is usually on the Yangshuo Bridge.

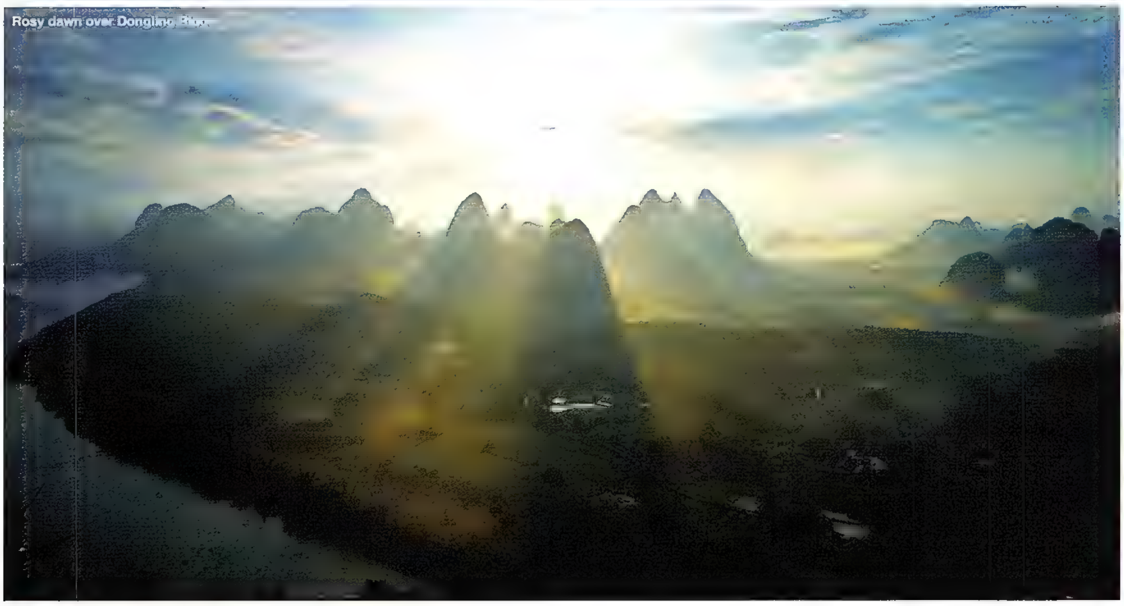
Camera Horseman SW612 (65mm lens); Aperture: 22; Speed: 1/8 second

[illegible] Yangshuo Bridge (or Lijiang riverside under the bridge)

[illegible] All year round



Zhuobi Peak in misty rain



Rosy dawn over Dongling Ridge

Huixian Bronze Bridge

9 Rosy Dawn Over Dongling Ridge

Dongling (Eastern Ridge) is situated on the eastern side of Lijiang River, away from the Yangshuo County Town across the river. A fantastic view can be obtained from here when the sky is crimsoned by the early sun and scarlet clouds.

Getting there It is easily accessible as it is located by the Yangshuo County Town.

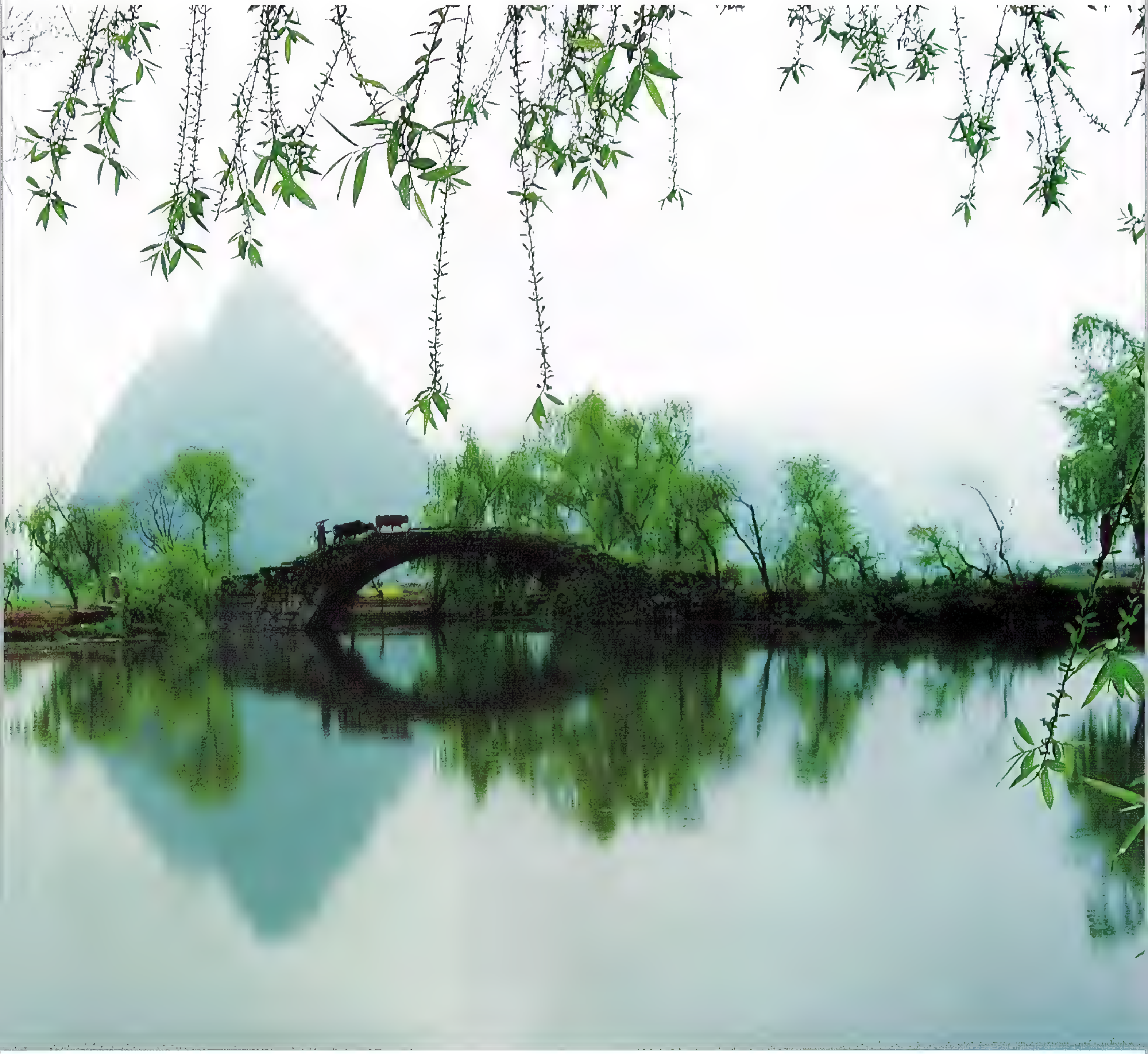
Photo shooting The top of Bilian Peak is the best spot for getting a rosy dawn over Dongling Ridge. You may get a surprise reward when it is clear after a rain. Yet it is not easy to get up to the Bilian Peak, and it's slippery after a rain, so make sure that it is safe.

Tips As you need to reach the top of the peak before dawn, make sure that you have nice shoes, a torch, enough water and food.

Camera Horseman SW612 (65mm lens); Aperture: 32; Speed: 1/5 second; film: E100VS slides.

[illegible] On top of the Bilian Peak.

[illegible] April ~ October.



10 Huixian Bronze Bridge

Huixian (Meeting the Fairy) Town is located 40 km southwest of the Guilin City. The stone-arch bronze bridge in the town was built in the Tang Dynasty (618—907). With the mountain ranges in the distance, the quiet bridge over the ancient Guilin-Liuzhou Canal, the green willows and water as well as yellow flowers form a beautiful picture of a waterside town in South China.

[illegible] Take a bus from the Guilin Bus Station to Huixian Town. After getting off at Huixian, walk toward the town centre. You will see a branch road at the turning point walk along a path in the field for about 400 metres to reach the bridge.

[illegible] You can get wonderful shots of the bridge either in misty rain or in sunlight.

[illegible] Nikon D100 (AF24 ~ 85mm lens); Aperture: 22; Speed: 1/60 second

[illegible] March ~ May

Love in Guilin

Photos & Article • Huang Yanhong

Beautiful places will always attract settlers. Not only Chinese, but even foreigners have lost their hearts to Guilin, some of them choosing to move and make a life here.

"Fragile Girl" Misses US President's Visit

During former US President Clinton's visit to Guilin, his appearance in the small Yucun (Fishing Hamlet) Village put the remote settlement under the media spotlight. Years later, Clinton's interpreter, Chris Barclay became deeply attached to Guilin. After his company opened a hotel in Yangshuo, he was able to help a little girl with a serious bone disease. He found her a job and also got President Clinton to grant her a very special wish. The girl's misfortune also touched a Canadian veteran who, along with his wife, chose to teach English in Yangshuo and settle down there.

1

I took a bus from Yangshuo to Xingping, then changed to a boat and reached Yucun Village in less than an hour.

I passed the house that the villagers said had been visited by Clinton. When he noticed the small shop attached to it, somewhat like one his grandmother used to run, he walked in. A woman in the house told me they were very excited as they never expected the President of the United States to visit them or shake hands with the family members. His hand had felt rather soft, she said.

She also told me that her sister's daughter, Zhao Chunli, was disabled and couldn't walk. She was taken to the United States by Clinton for medical treatment and is now working in Yangshuo with her mother. It was all made possible by an American named Chris Barclay.

Barclay was a student in China 10 years ago

2

when he was asked to serve as the president's interpreter.

During Clinton's visit, local officials kept Chunli out of sight, but the rest of her family met the president. The next year when Chris Barclay revisited the village, he met the girl by chance. Chunli was born with osteogenesis imperfecta or brittle bone disease. Her bones are easily breakable, and she has never been able to stand upright. What surprised Barclay was that this extremely disabled girl looked happy sitting there knitting a wool slipper. She told him in a sweet voice that the slippers would be sold to tourists to earn money so she could resume her studies. She had only had four years of schooling up to then.

Barclay began to help Chunli by arranging a teacher for her, so that she could concentrate on learning English and computer science. When the company Barclay worked for opened the Yangshuo Mountain Retreat Hotel, Chunli was given a job there as a receptionist and before long she was fluent in English. Barclay wrote a letter to President Clinton, telling him about Chunli. He said the girl wanted a picture of him because she was absent from the photo of the president with her family.

A month later Barclay received a reply that read: "Dear Mr Barclay, I was impressed with your letter. I am glad that you want to help Chunli to have a better life and I regret not meeting her in Guilin. She looks special and very young. Enclosed is a photo of mine and I hope she will like it." On the picture he had written, "Best wishes to Chunli".

After learning that Chunli's life was in danger if she did not get some timely medical attention, Barclay, his wife and their friends started a fund for her. They collected enough money to send her to a children's hospital in Los Angeles for a few months of specialized treatment. Although she still cannot stand, her health has improved markedly. During her stay she visited Disney World, watched an American-style football game, and also had her first taste of Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's.

As I walked into the hotel hall where Chunli works, I noticed a girl talking with guests in English. With her big eyes and small, thin face, she looked no more than 15 years old. This was no doubt Chunli.

Chunli, who is actually 24, was much smaller than I imagined her. At a height of about half a metre, she sat on a table, her legs crossed over the counter before her, the computer to the left. The letter and picture Clinton sent her hang in the hall. Looking at the photo, I sighed with emotion: I was amazed that this former US president had opened his heart to an unlucky Chinese country girl.

While Chunli typed on the computer and chatted with me, her mother came over with a piece of watermelon. Her mom also works at the hotel so she can take care of her daughter. When I asked her why her husband hadn't come, she said he had to tend their pomelo trees and land at home. Chunli smiled sweetly as she listened to her mother.

An elderly man walked over with the help of a crutch to talk with Chunli. He was her Canadian English teacher, Mr Laurie. While fighting against Nazi Germany in World War II, he was wounded in the left leg and cannot walk without the crutch. He said he and his wife had fallen in love with Yangshuo and came here to teach English. They now also teach the language to the Chinese hotel staff.

I asked him if he would ever go back to Canada. "No," he said, "There isn't a home there anymore."

Sadly, I didn't meet Chris Barclay this time.

Chunli is unfortunate in that she is unable to stand and walk around like a normal person; yet she is also very fortunate to have had a level of care scarcely attainable for many people, care that came from so far away.

1. Chunli sits on a table receiving guests at a hotel.
2. The Mountain Retreat Hotel by the Yulong River.
3. The photo of Clinton's visit to Yucun Village has become a tourist souvenir.
4. Canadian veteran Mr Laurie is Chunli's English teacher.
5. Chunli's autographed photo of former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

4

To Chun Li
With Best Wishes,
Bill Clinton
5

Xingping — Home of a Japanese

老寨山旅館
欢迎
Welco
1

1. Lin Kezhi in front of his hotel.
2. Lin Kezhi and his young wife.

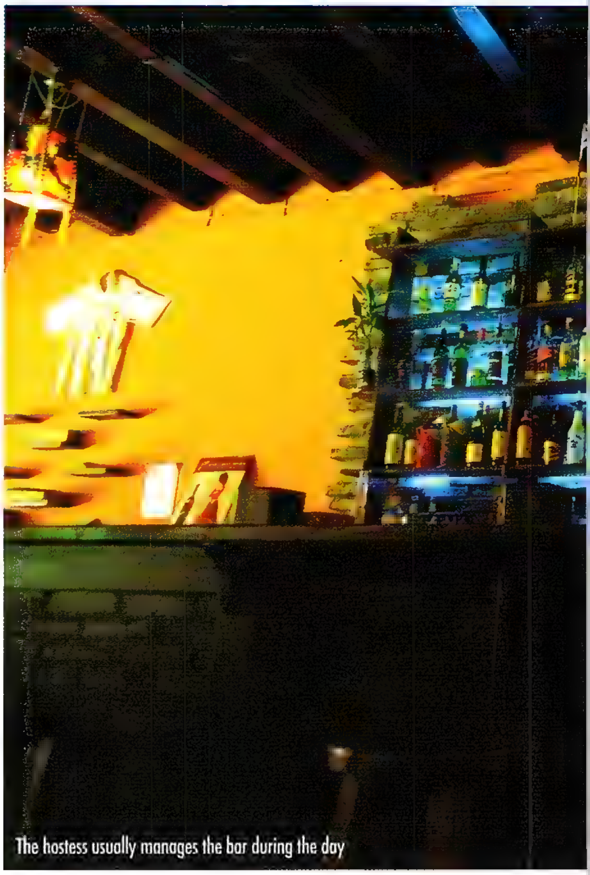
Xingping is a beautiful small town by the Lijiang River. With a deep love for its pristine natural landscape, an elderly Japanese man has settled down here and opened a small hotel at the foot of a mountain near Xingping Dock.

The hotel is located in a quiet area, its large billboard covered with cartoon drawings about its location and transportation links.The owner, a bespectacled man in his 60s, appeared cultured and gentle. He invited us into his room and told me that he has a Chinese name — Lin Kezhi.

While his room was a little cluttered, the guest rooms upstairs were all clean and tidy. As we were talked, his wife came in. She is 32, younger than her husband by three decades. Mr Lin said his wife was from Qingzhou in Guangxi. Their life in the countryside has been rather peaceful. After running the hotel for four years, they have a child now so Mr Lin seldom goes out of town.

An environmentalist, Lin Kezhi once worked in Pokhara, Nepal to help build a hydraulic power station. Later he funded the building of a small hydraulic power station in northern rural Thailand to stop the local practice of felling trees for firewood and thereby protect the environment. At present he is organizing the environmentally friendly activity "Face-washing for the Beautiful Lijiang". He said many people had responded positively since he put the idea forward. If the expected 75,000 participants turn out, it may be the largest environmental protection event in history. If successful, it will be recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Niutou Bar



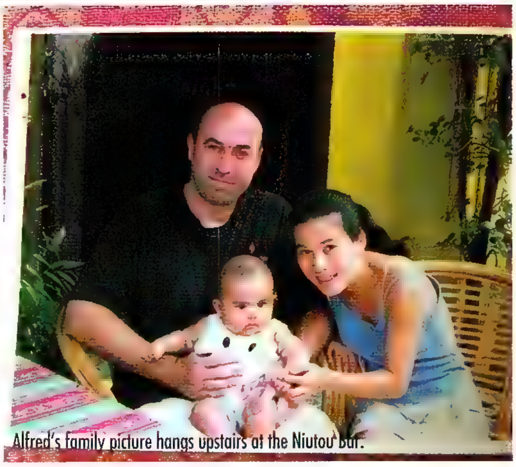
The hostess usually manages the bar during the day

The Niutou (Ox Head) Bar is a popular hangout on West Street (Xi Jie), Yangshuo, run by Australian Alfred. Having fallen in love with the place at first sight, he called Yangshuo the friendliest place in China. "No matter what the situation, the locals try everything they can think of to help others, always with a smile and warmth. I've enjoyed every minute I've spent in Yangshuo, so I'd like to stay here as a Yangshuo resident." He even married a pretty Chinese girl and settled down.

When we visited his home, Alf wasn't in. His wife said he'd be back in the evening.

The hostess was quite good-looking. She came to here study English after graduating from Nanning University, where she met Alf. After a courtship of two years, they married in 2003.

She said that with their different cultural

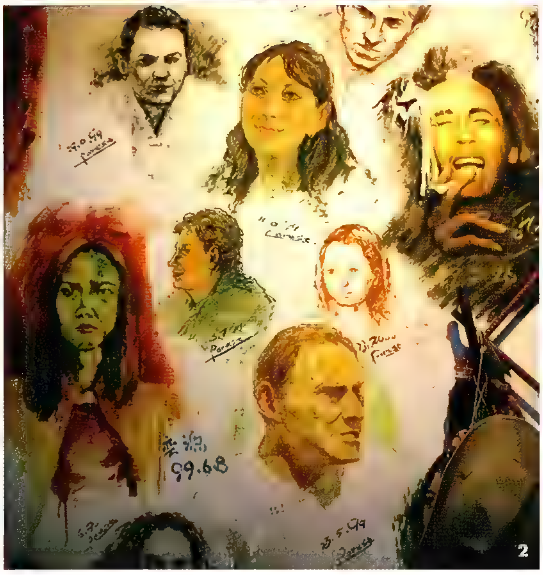


Alfred's family picture hangs upstairs at the Niutou bar.

backgrounds and habits, they sometimes quarrelled at first, but now they are used to each other. Her parents are very traditional and were initially against the marriage. Even now her mother doesn't get along with her husband. "My mom could take care of our son at her home, but Alf just wouldn't agree. He can't stand the traditional Chinese way of doting upon the child and would never leave our son with my parents.

When asked about her future plans, his mother said they would make their investment back in a year or so, and they wanted to earn more. Maybe they would live in Australia in the future.

Laury — An American Veteran



1. Laury sits at the bar looking at the familiar street.

2. An oil portrait of Laury and other visitors years ago in a friend's bar.

Vietnam War veteran Laury loves not only the landscapes of Guilin, but also the women. For one reason or another, his former wives have all left him. But he is very philosophical and never complaining about his lost.

At the Hong Xing (Red Star) Bar in Yangshuo's West Street, I noticed a foreigner sitting by the door, drinking alone. He looked interesting; his face was not very smooth but his eyes sparkled. Occasionally people on the street greeted him as they walked by. He seemed to be a frequent visitor. I greeted him, too, and he introduced himself politely in Chinese: "I'm Laury. In Chinese it sounds like *laolei* (meaning "always worn out")." Everyone laughed at this.

The owner of the Red Star Express, known to the locals as Ah Li, is from Singapore. He came here several years ago to open the cafes and married a Chinese woman, too. The American Laury's Chinese was poor at first, so Ah Li interpreted for him. Laury fought in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968, but it seemed he didn't like to talk about it.

Ah Li told me that Laury opened a bar with his ex-wife in Yangshuo and stayed there for five years, back when there were only a few businesses along the street.

Later Laury went back to the States to take care of some business, leaving his wife to look after the bar alone. When he returned in half a year, his wife was gone and the bar had been sold. Laury did not give up, however, and married another Chinese girl, from Liuzhou, where the couple opened a bakery. Laury said he was especially attached to Yangshuo. This time he had come back to see his old friends.

Having Fun in Yangshuo

Photos & Article • Huang Yanhong

Only after visiting Yangshuo did I understand why so many people want to stay here long after their holiday ends. During the day, relax with a leisurely raft trip down the Yulong (Dragon-Encountering) River, ride bikes past farmers' fields or stroll around the countryside. In the evening, watch ospreys dive for fish, or soak up the nightlife in the bars along West Street.

Rafting the Yulong River

1. Dykes abound along the Yulong River. My heart jumped wildly each time we passed one.

2. A raft floats along in the charming landscape.

3. Take the bike on the raft so you can use it once you're on shore again.

4. A singer on the river adds a special lustre to the Yulong.

There is no doubt that the scenery along the Lijiang River in Yangshuo is beautiful. But as it is a busy route, may I suggest a quieter cruise down its branch, the Yulong River. Floating on a bamboo raft past lush, tree-covered mountains and quaint farmers' houses, the river's enchanting rural scenery cannot be matched, not even by the famous Lijiang.

Yulong River runs through the outskirts of Yangshuo County Town, most of it in the section between the Land of Peach Blossoms at Baisha and the Gongnong (Working Farmers) Bridge at Darongshu (Big Banyan Tree). About 16-km long and 40-metre wide, it flows slowly and its water is extremely clean.

Flanked by gently rolling hills luxuriant with bamboo groves, the river flows past one pristine hamlet after another, smoke spiralling up from the chimneys. Gazing at the flat, orderly farmland stretching out all around me, I felt refreshed.

Major tourist attractions along the river include: Yulong Bridge, Shuangliu (Double-Course) Scenic Spot, Xiatang (Summer Crab Apple) Wonderland, Big and Small Wuzhi (Five-Finger) Hills, Shizi (Lion) Hill, Baxian (Eight Immortals) Crag, Xiangui (Fairy Laurel) Ancient Bridge, and the site of the Old Guiyi County Town. As much of the riverside is not accessible by bus, these places are best visited by hiking, bicycling or rafting.

The sheer number of bamboo rafts along the dock amazed me. I hopped onto one, bringing my bike along with me.

Along the river dykes poke out above the green surface of the water. The boatman said the dykes were built for irrigation purposes. It is no easy task to get past the dykes — a special feature of rafting on the Yulong. The boatmen have to get down into the river before reaching the dykes and push the raft through. Then they jump onto the back of the raft, momentarily plunging it into the water, which rushes onto the raft. Few tourists would not be alarmed.

Some boats sell lotus seed pods, beer and snacks — floating food shops on the river. Younger tourists bought squirt guns to shoot water at each other. There were also many foreigners who, unlike the Chinese tourists, went without sunshade and lay on the rafts to tan.

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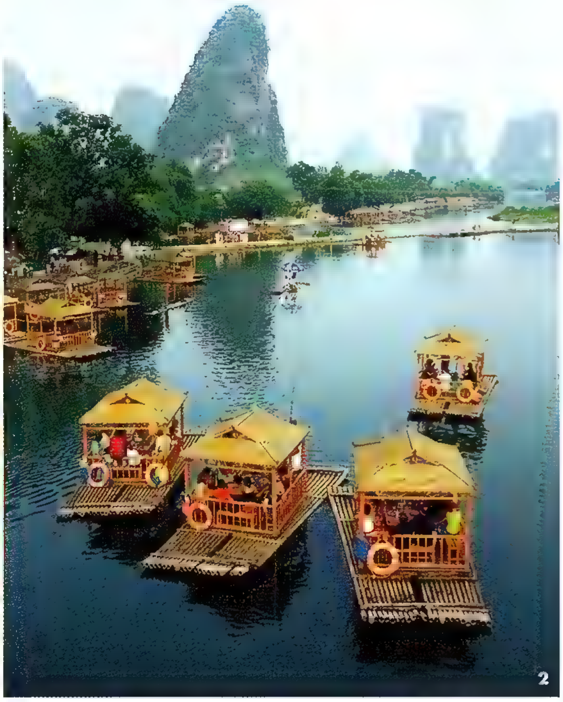
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A Cycle of Delight

The most attractive way of sightseeing in such a picturesque place as Yangshuo must be by bicycle. Best of all, you can ride at your own pace. Afraid of getting lost? The town is filled with guides (mainly women from the nearby countryside) who will show you around the hills and fields for between 10 to 20 yuan a day.

Most of Yangshuo's hostels rent bikes for five to 10 yuan per day. A several hundred yuan deposit is requested, depending on the condition of the bike, before you can get on the road.

The most popular route is Yangshuo — Darongshu — Yualiang Hill — Yancun (Swallow Hamlet) Village — Tianjia River — Yangshuo. Some 20 km long, this route includes time pedalling on highways as well as country roads, and promises spectacular scenery.

Set off from Yangshuo and ride along the Yangshuo-Lipu Highway to Yueliang Hill. At Yueliang Village, left of the hill, have a rest and a meal at one of the family inns and restaurants.

Or try this alternative route, which is also 20 km long, with similar scenery: Yangshuo — Gongnong Bridge — Mountain Retreat Hotel — Tongmen (Shared Gate) Crag — Fenglou (Windy Tower) Village — Moon Hill — Big Banyan Tree — Yangshuo.

More athletic and skilled riders may want a greater challenge. The Yangshuo — Fuli (Welfare) — Chelang (Wagon Boy) Hill — Xingping — Shitoucheng (Stone City Wall) — Putao — Yangshuo route is a two-day, 120-km ride with mainly rural scenery. The section from Xingping to Putao is rather rough, but as it includes a vast stretch of open country, if you can get on higher ground, you will be rewarded with a broad and magnificent view.

Ospreys in the Dark

The osprey, or fish hawk, is a born fishing ace. Watching the birds work at night has become an essential part of the photographer's tour of Guilin. No crouching in the shadows is required to snap the picture-perfect shot. For a fee, fishermen will manage the show for you. The spectators and the osprey seem equally happy.

You can make arrangements through your travel agency, which usually includes it as an elective item at a charge of 100 yuan. If you contact a fisherman yourself, it may be cheaper, but there is a danger of jer'quers (customs officials who search boats) interrupting the show.

As night fell, we boarded a boat at a small quay close to West Street.

The boat started to move, followed closely by a bamboo raft. An elderly man stood astride it with a few ospreys. After the boat floated further out, the man began to drive the ospreys downriver with a bamboo pole. The birds dove into the water, making a big stir. Then, stretching their necks up, they reappeared unhurried, fish clamped in their mouths. Those with trophies were ushered aboard to turn over the fish before diving into the river again.

After a few rounds of this, our boat stopped by a reef and we were all asked to get off. As the boat glided noiselessly away.

Some 20 minutes later a motorboat returned for us. The boatman explained that tourists are forbidden in this area, so they could only sail at night. Plus shortly after launching, they learned there were jer'quers about, so they had to hide for a while.

2

West Street Nightlife

An old thoroughfare in the Yangshuo County Seat, West Street is lined with many bars and restaurants, each with its own style. Along with avenues in the old towns of Dali and Lijiang in Yunnan Province, it is one of China's three most famous ancient leisure streets. Many foreigners visit and have even settled down here, opening businesses and starting families.

West Street has always been Yangshuo's commercial street.

Many foreigners have married Chinese in Yangshuo. In the last few years, some 300 young women have left the county with their foreign husbands. More than 100 foreigners reside in Yangshuo, most working as foreign language teachers. Among some 30 private foreign language schools, the larger ones have several hundred students, the smaller ones a few dozen.

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Over half the 50-odd businesses on West Street are run by foreigners. Since 2002, they have come from Germany, the US, Singapore. They have stayed because it is easy to make a living here and even easier to earn money from other foreigners.

The first notable foreign visitor dropped in at Lisa's Cafe in 1992, when owner Li Hongshen entertained former French President François Mitterrand here. After coming ashore at Lijiang Dock, he walked into the restaurant and stayed for about a quarter of an hour.

Across from Lisa's Cafestands the Red Star Express. Singaporean owner Ah Li took a fancy to Yangshuo during a tour; afterwards he came back once a year and stayed for a month, finding it similar to Ngow Chair Shoie (Chinatown) in Singapore. Later he opened this Western fast food restaurant and eventually married a Chinese woman who worked for him.

But West Street really comes alive at night, when the whole avenue is steeped in a kind of intoxication, all the lights sparkling and streams of people flowing past. The T-shaped crossing at Xianqian (County Front) Street and West Street is the most crowded, with every seat in the vicinity occupied, from balcony to ground floor. Troupes of performers come out to sing and play their instruments. Just as an accordion strikes up on one side of the street, a sweet flute is heard on the other; a lusheng love song is followed closely by the strains of a pop tune performed by a crooner strolling among the customers.

The music intermingles with the calls of hawkers at their roadside stalls, selling lotus seeds from Liuzhou, dark sesame paste, the first tea in Yangshuo, all wreathed in fragrant smoke and creating a festive atmosphere.

The bars start filling up around 10 pm. After much drinking, it's time for a midnight snack. Fish stewed in beer, an award-winning, gourmet dish, is the most popular.

People seem friendlier in Yangshuo. A pair of lovers sitting nearby started a conversation with us, saying this was indeed a place where dreams came true. Leaning against a baluster and seemingly half asleep, they appeared to be in a dream themselves.

1. The best way to enjoy the landscape of Yangshuo is by bike.

2. At dusk, the placid Lijiang River is strewn with lights from fishing boats. (by Teng Jia)

3. The later it gets, the more vibrant West Street becomes.

4. It's fun to just sit and people-watch for awhile. (by Teng Bin)

Impression • Third Sister Liu

Guilin's landscape brings the beautiful and touching folk songs by Liu San Jie (Third Sister) to mind. Although Ms Huang Wanqiu is growing older, the charm of Liu San Jie is being preserved and carried on by a group of artists that includes film director Zhang Yimou. With the elegant Lijiang River scenery and local life as their background, the performers left strong impressions of Liu San Jie on their enraptured audience.

1. The Liu San Jie show is simply stunning. (by Zhang Liping)

2. Undulating red 'waves' symbolize the sea.

3. Fishing boats on the Lijiang under a blue moon.

4. A fisherman's daughter is married to the accompaniment of folk songs.

After watching one performance, someone commented: "This show cannot be found anywhere else on earth; it is worth flying from anywhere in the world to see it."

The programme's prologue states:

"This show is completely different from traditional stage performances.

The theatre is in Nature; the show changes with the four seasons and differs on sunny or rainy days.

Here, human creation accounts for only half, with the other half being in the hands of Nature.

If it is raining, please put on the raincoat prepared for you,

In the hot summer, we advise you to bring mosquito repellent,

In the flood season, half of the seats may be covered in water and, in case of thunder and lightning, the show might have to be stopped.

This is our show, a show together with Nature.

Some 600 performers take part in the show. They include fishermen from the five villages along the river; they work during the day and arrive after supper to perform on their rafts. There are also young singers of the Dong ethnic group from remote mountain regions and girls from ethnic minority areas, who sing in their purely natural voices and dance in their rustic way..."

In the Zhuang ethnic group legend, Liu San Jie is an immortal singer. The show is divided into four parts: Red Folk Songs, Blue Sentiments, Silver Grand Ceremony, and Golden Lights on a Fishing Boat. With no distinct scenario or characters, the show is comprised of a series of impressions.

I was totally intoxicated by the sweeping scene changes: a red curtain becomes a sea of undulating crimson, with innumerable fishermen shuttling back and forth behind the waves; in the dark of the night, the lights of the fishing boats dance, while phantom fish appear and disappear in the misty blue smoke; in the pride of a golden morning, busy farmers labour against a poetic pastoral landscape. I was deeply impressed by the Miao girls adorned in their silver jewellery walking in the water, hand in hand.

Suddenly the silvery scene vanished, only to reappear in layers.

The lighting, smoke screen, colours, indigenous folk songs, and crude yo-heave-ho stimulated all my senses throughout the exhilarating hour-long show. ⊂

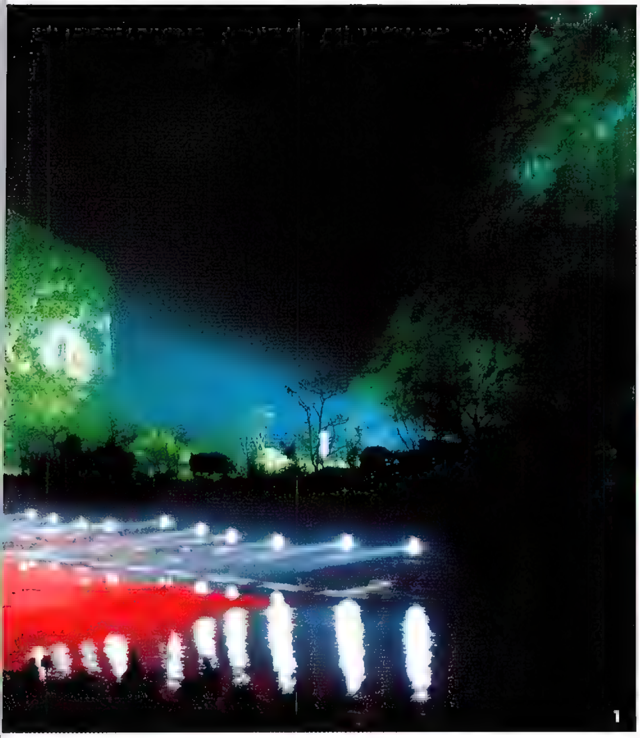
Translated by Yu Ling

Liu San Jie — Immortal Queen of Folk Songs

According to legend, Liu San Jie was a Zhuang ethnic group singer during the Tang Dynasty (618—907). Born to a poor family in Yizhou, Guangxi, she was clever and beautiful and made a living with her brother by farming and cutting brushwood. With her sweet voice, her favourite pastime was singing folk songs. Her songs became popular among the locals, especially among the young people who, under her influence, eventually began a folk song fair.

Landlord Mo Huairen wanted to marry Liu San Jie but she was reluctant, so he invited three local scholars skilled at composing songs to challenge her singing ability. They turned out to be no match for her and rowed away in defeat. Later, in collusion with government officials, Mo kidnapped Liu San Jie, trussed her up tightly and threw her from a cliff into the river. Yet she managed to escape from the water and reappeared at Yufeng (Fish Peak) Hill in Liuzhou.

Throughout the ages Liu San Jie gradually evolved from a bright, beautiful singer to a mysterious queen of folk songs. Legends about her have been published in poetry anthologies and as scenarios for stage shows. In1961 Liu San Jie, China's first scenic film musical, was a hit all over the country and made a star of its lead actress, Huang Wanqiu.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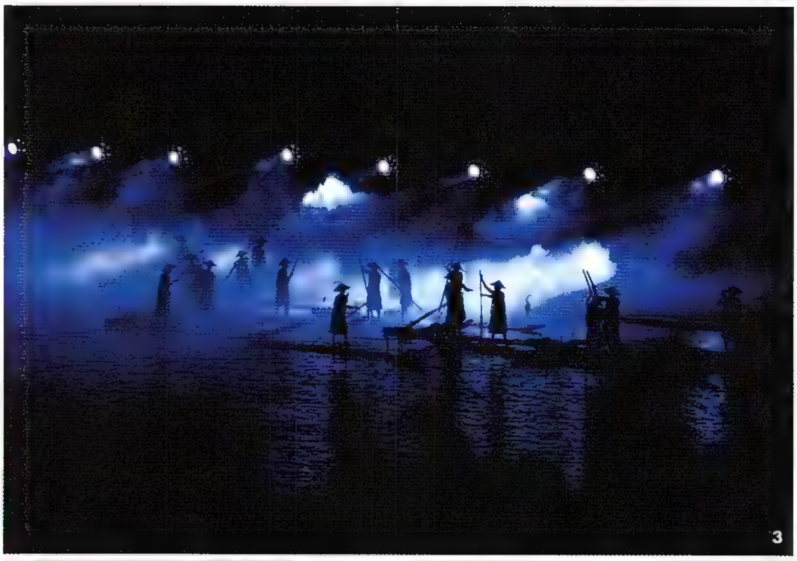
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Tips for Touring Guilin and Yangshuo

Photos & Article · Huang Yanhong

It is very convenient to travel in Guilin either with a group or by oneself, as it is a developed tourist city close to Guangdong and Hong Kong and has complete facilities in terms of transportation and accommodation.

Getting there

By air

Almost all the big cities have scheduled flights to Guilin. There are three or four flights to and from Hong Kong every day, eight to and from Guangzhou (660 yuan), six to and from Shenzhen (660 yuan), flying for about one hour. For flights to the hinterland, there is often a discount, sometimes as low as 50 or 60 percent off.

By train

Among numerous trains to Guilin, the one from Guangzhou starts at 17:46 p.m. and arrives at 6:40 the next morning; the one from Shenzhen leaves at 18: 05 p.m. and arrives at 10:30 a.m.

Information Office of Guilin Railway Station: (773) 215 2222, 216 4722

By long-distance bus

Most people choose the long-distance bus to travel between Guangdong and Guilin. Schedule of long-distance buses between Guangdong and Guilin (with a stop at Duhui, Yangshuo)

Accommodation

Guilin

Lijiang Waterfall Hotel (5-star)
Add: 1 Shanhu Beilu; Tel: (773) 282 2881

Sheraton Guilin Hotel (5-star)
Add: 15 Binjiang Lu; Tel: (773) 282 5588

Guilin Plaza Hotel (4-star)
Add: 20 Lijiang Lu; Tel: (773) 588 2688

Golden Dragon Hotel (4-star)
Add: 21 Lijiang Lu; Tel: (773) 580 8885

Baili Commercial Hotel (3-star)
Add: 2 Jiefang Donglu; Tel: (773) 311 1111

Lian Fa Hotel (3-star)
Add: Zhongshan Nanlu; Tel: (773) 381 3356

Dangui Hotel (3-star)
Add: Zhongshan Nanlu; Tel: (773) 383 4300

Guilin Diamond Hotel (3-star)
Add: 1 Hongling Lu, Xiufeng District; Tel: (773) 382 2333

Nanyuan Guesthouse (2-star)
Add: Zhongshan Nanlu; Tel: (773) 383 2609

Guilin International Hotel (2-star)
Add: 1 Lijiang Lu; Tel: (773) 581 4200

Yangshuo (mostly family inns in West Street and neighbouring areas):

Morning Sun Hotel

With good location in Chengzhong Lu, within one-minute walk to the West Street, it is a very Chinese hotel. Tel: (773) 881 3881, (773) 882 7872

Jinxin Hotel

Located on Guihua Lu within one-minute walk to the West Street, it is a small but very clean hotel. Tel: (773) 882 7872

Sunshine Spa Hotel

Located near Yangshuo Park, it is owned by a New Zealander, so the decor is a combination of the East and West. Tel: (773) 882 8333

Fangcao Family Hostel

Located on Huashan Lu near the Yangshuo gas station, it offers free Internet service. Tel: (773) 882 1064

Friendship Hotel

Located on Chengzhong Lu within one-minute walk to the West Street, it is a small cosy and refreshing hotel. Tel: (773) 882 8696

Qin Yuan Hotel

Located on Guihua Lu next to the West Street, it is decorated in ancient Chinese style in a typically Yangshuo way. Tel: (773) 881 9999

Xi He Hotel

Located on the West Street and decorated in the Ming and Qing styles, it is cosy, elegant, and very relaxing. The balconies by the street look romantic but couldn't quiet down until deep at night. If you want to have a quiet place for sleep, better look for somewhere else. Tel: (773) 882 6969

Japan Centre (Xingping Laozhaishan Hotel)

Located to the left of the Xingping Dock, it is very clean, charging about 100 yuan/ room.(Room prices for the hotels above are mostly between 60 ~ 100 yuan a room, and may rise at weekends or festivals.

Cafes and Restaurants in Yangshuo

Under the Moon

Run by a Taiwaner, it is also one of the oldest cafes on the West Street, providing Chinese and Western food and a variety of drinks upstairs and downstairs. Also, the apple pizza there is also very authentic, attracting many foreigners.

Meiyou Cafe

I was told that this is the first cafes on the West Street to add its name to the Lonely Planet. "There is no beer that is not iced, no dish that is not delicious, no service that is not satisfactory..." so of course there is no reason that you don't come in.

Cafe Mingyuan

This is an elegant cafes not crowded with customers. Its fragrant strong coffee and refined environment is most suitable for those who like a quiet spot.

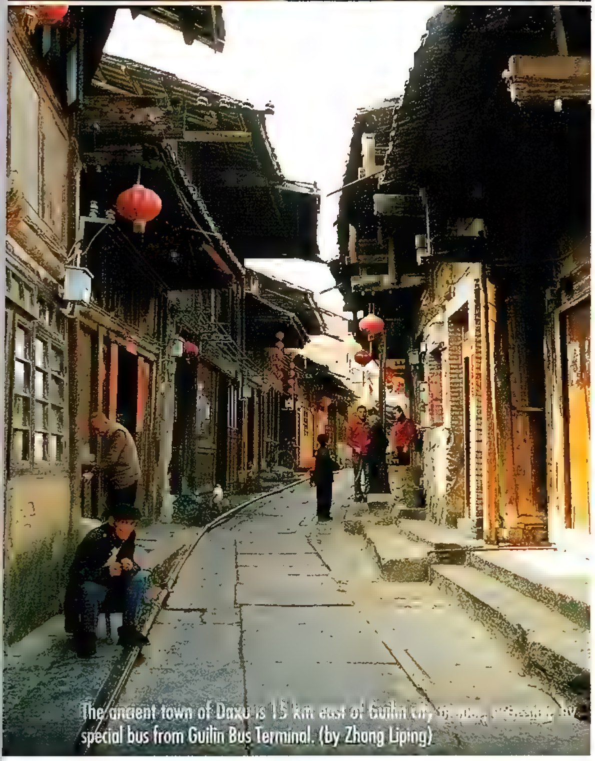
Global Village Cafe

In this simple bar the owner is warm-hearted and humourous who speaks good English, French and Japanese and has even written a book about the West Street. The food there is also tasty, with the Gold Medal dishes of fish and duck stewed in beer the speciality here.

Animal House

Riding around Yangshuo is so relaxing and enjoyable.

Yangshuo's festive West Street is alive with night life.



The ancient town of Daxu is 15 km east of Guilin city [illegible] by special bus from Guilin Bus Terminal. (by Zhong Liping)

It is opposite the Global Village Cafes selling the best roast chicken in Yangshuo. Its cheese cake probably has no match on the West Street. It is owned by an Australian Chinese who has run the business for years and has many friends in Yangshuo.

Twin Peaks Cafe

Situated at the central part of the West Street, this is also one of the earliest cafes on the street. Its owner is honest with customers and thus has a good business. In addition to coffee, there is also Chinese and Western food and guest rooms are also available.

The Stone Roses

Its nice environment and pretty good dishes have made it popular. Guitar shows are on in the evening when there are many foreign customers. Some Chinese young people take the chance to practice their spoken foreign languages there.

Red Star Bar

It offers very good Chinese and Western food. At night it is also bubbling with customers. The owner came from Singapore; he likes chatting and making friends and can tell many stories about the West Street.

Sightseeing Tours

Touring Guiling

Elephant Trunk Hill

Also called Elephant Hill, it is 50 m above water surface at the confluence of the Lijiang and Taohua rivers.

Getting there: Take Bus No. 2 and get off at Wenchang Qiao Stop, or take free Bus No. 57 or No. 58 to Xiangshan Park in the city centre.

Admission: 25 yuan

Reed Flute Cave

Located on the northern outskirts of Guilin about 7 km from the city proper, it is famous for its fantastic stalactites.

Getting there: Take Bus No. 3 or free Bus No. 58.

Admission: 60 yuan

Seven-Star Cave

Originally an underground watercourse, this mammoth cave is full of grotesque stalactites, stalagmites, stelae, etc.

Getting there: Take Bus No. 11 or free tourist Bus No. 58.

Admission: 30 yuan for Seven-Star Cave; 35 yuan for Seven-Star Park

Seven-Star Park

The largest park in Guilin, it is named so because there are seven peaks — Putuo, Camel, etc. lining up like the Big Dipper.

Getting there: Take Bus Nos. 11 or 18 to its front gate in the downtown area. Free Bus No. 58 also goes there.

Admission: 35 yuan (65 yuan if the Seven-Star Crag is included)

Fubo Hill

This solitary hill was named after its Temple (built in the Tang Dynasty) to the Han Dynasty (206 BC—220) General Ma Yuan titled Fubo.

Getting there: Take Bus No. 2 to Fuboshan Stop, or free Bus No. 58 to Fubo Park in downtown area.

Admission: 15 yuan

Diecai Hill

Located on the west side of the Lijiang River in northern Guilin City, Diecai Hill is equally famous with Duxiu (Solitary Beauty) Hill and Fubo Hill.

Getting there: Take Bus No. 2 to the Second People's Hospital, or the free Bus No. 58 to Diecai Hill Park in downtown area.

Admission: 20 yuan

Ming Prince City Wall

It was built when the founder of the Ming Dynasty Zhu Yuanzhang's grand nephew was conferred the title Prince of Jingjiang.

Getting there: Take Bus Nos. 1, 18 or 20 and get off at Fengbei Lukou Stop in downtown area, then walk ahead for some 50 metres to the wall.

Busy night fair in Guilin

Clog slippers sold on a fair in Guilin

Admission: 50 yuan for through ticket including the Ming Prince's City Wall and Mansion, and the Duxiu Peak

Cruise on the Lijiang River

Ferry ticket: Class A (super luxury with air conditioner); Class B (luxury with air conditioner); Class C: (ordinary with air conditioner)

Busy season (April ~ November and Spring Festival period): Class A: 450 yuan; Class B: 270 yuan; Class C: 210 yuan.

Off season: Class A: 380 yuan: Class B: 240 yuan; Class C: 190 yuan. Chinese economy meal and buffet are included in the ticket.

Departure: 9:30 ~ 10:30 a.m., cruising about 4 hours

Cruise on Two Rivers and Four Lakes

Covering Lijiang and Taohua rivers; Mulong, Guihu, Ronghu and Shanhu lakes, the cruise is more beautiful at night as there are plenty of light decorations.

Getting there: Take Bus No. 11 or free Bus No. 58 to Gongyuan Damen (entrance of park)

Time: 2 hours; Ferry ticket: 149 yuan

Other useful tips:

There are no conductors on buses in Guilin, which charge 1 yuan. So prepare one yuan change in advance. Since Guilin is not large, you can take a bus to almost everywhere you want to go.

There is a very grandiose waterfall show every night at Lijiang Waterfall Hotel, free to the public. It starts at 20:00 every night, lasting for only 15 minutes.

Touring Yangshuo

Rafting Down the Yulong River

I suggest riding to the starting points in the upper reaches of the Yulong River. Rafting from Jima to Gongnong Bridge takes about 2 hours (80 yuan/a raft); from Jiuxian to Gongnong Bridge, about four hours (120 yuan/a raft); from Fuli Bridge to Gongnong Bridge, about five hours (160 yuan/a raft). Tow persons can share a raft, with bikes on it.

Possible riding and hiking routes

- Yangshuo (38 km) —Yangdi (24 km) — Xingping (25 km) — Yangshuo
- Yangshuo (38 km) — Yangdi — by boat — Caoping (28 km) — Xingping (25 km)— Yangshuo
- Yangshuo (9 km) — Baisha (2 km) — Yulong Bridge (4 km) — Jiuxian (3 km) —Jima (2 km) — Yangshuo
- Yangshuo (5 km) — Jima (9 km) — Jiwodu (1.5 km) — Yueliang Hill (8 km) —Yangshuo
- Yangshuo (4 km) — Aishan (5 km) — Gongnong Bridge (6 km) — Yangshuo

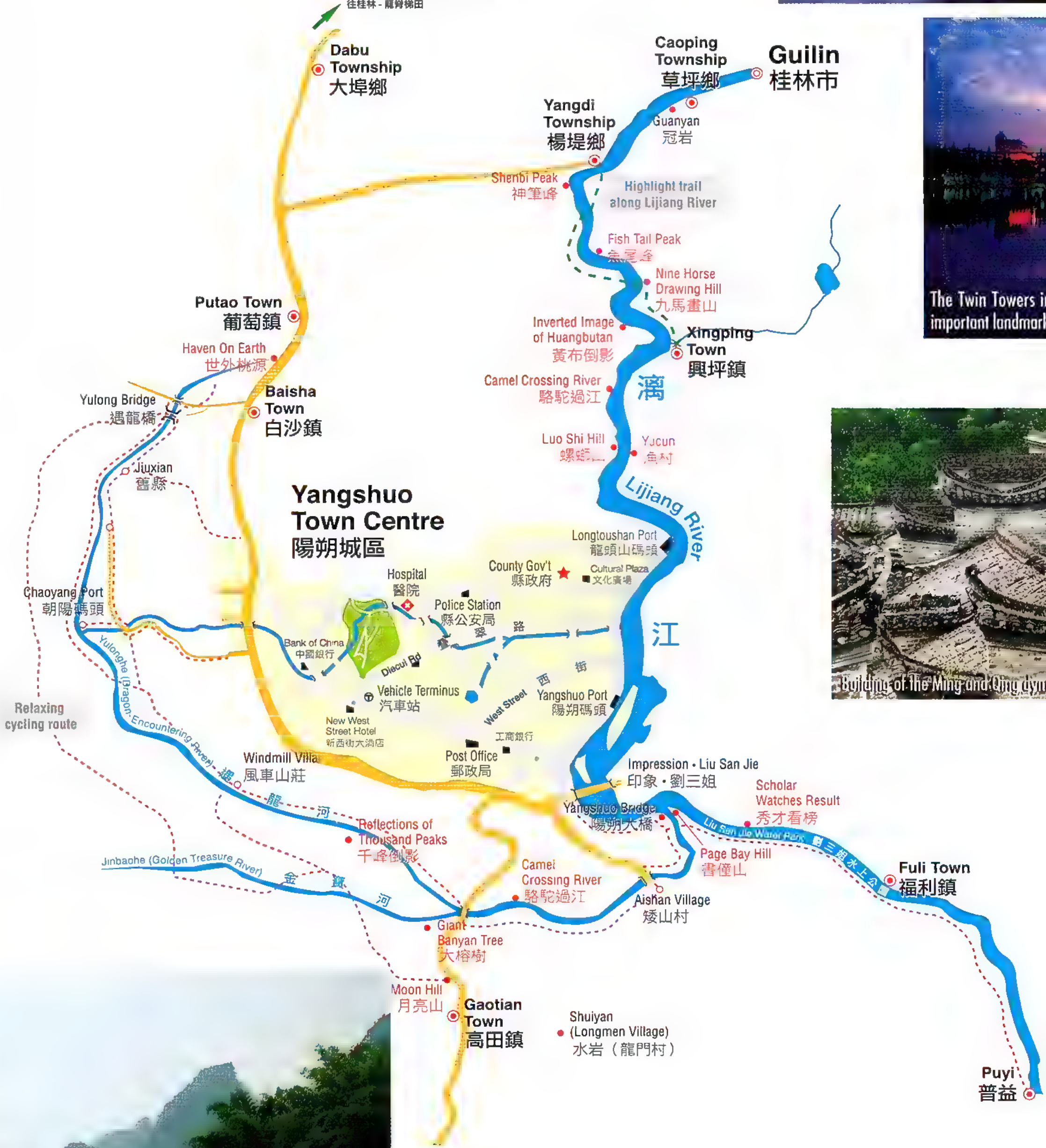
Tips for Yangshuo Tour:

- The lowest price of the ticket to Impression • Liu San Jie is 188 yuan. The unofficial prices of 30 or 50 yuan are offered by local villagers who might take you to a boat or up a hill familiar only to them to look from the distance or a higher spot. Some hotels for backpackers offer the tickets at only 138 yuan by reservation. There are often two shows at weekend: the first starts at 20:30; the second at 21:45.
- Places for lodging are available in the West Street, but they are not recommended for those who want to sleep well. The owners may tell you that usually it won't be quiet until 4 a.m

Map for Touring Guilin, Lijiang River and Yangshuo

Elephant Trunk Hill, the most famous scenic spot in Guilin (by Teng Bin)

The Twin Towers in brilliant lights have become an important landmark of Guilin. (by Teng Bin)


to Guilin - LongZhi Terraced Fields
往桂林 - 龍脊梯田
Dabu Township
大埠鄉
Caoping Township
草坪鄉
Guilin
桂林市
Guanyan
冠岩
Yangdi Township
楊堤鄉
Shenbi Peak
神筆峰
Highlight trail along Lijiang River
Fish Tail Peak
魚尾峯
Nine Horse Drawing Hill
九馬畫山
Inverted Image of Huangbutan
黃布倒影
Xingping Town
興坪鎮
Camel Crossing River
駱駝過江
灕
Luo Shi Hill
螺螄山
Yucun
漁村
Lijiang River
江
Putao Town
葡萄鎮
Haven On Earth
世外桃源
Baisha Town
白沙鎮
Yulong Bridge
遇龍橋
Jiuxian
舊縣
Yangshuo Town Centre
陽朔城區
Longtoushan Port
龍頭山碼頭
County Gov't
縣政府
Cultural Plaza
文化廣場
Hospital
醫院
Police Station
縣公安局
叠翠路
Chaoyang Port
朝陽碼頭
Bank of China
中國銀行
Diecui Rd
Vehicle Terminus
汽車站
West Street
西街
Yangshuo Port
陽朔碼頭
New West Street Hotel
新西街大酒店
工商銀行
Post Office
郵政局
Relaxing cycling route
Yulonghe (Dragon-Encountering River)
遇龍河
Windmill Villa
風車山莊
Impression • Liu San Jie
印象・劉三姐
Scholar Watches Result
秀才看榜
Yangshuo Bridge
陽朔大橋
Liu San Jie Water Park
劉三姐水上公
Reflections of Thousand Peaks
千峰倒影
Page Bay Hill
書僮山
Jinbaohe (Golden Treasure River)
金寶河
Camel Crossing River
駱駝過江
Aishan Village
矮山村
Fuli Town
福利鎮
Giant Banyan Tree
大榕樹
Moon Hill
月亮山
Gaotian Town
高田鎮
Shuiyan (Longmen Village)
水岩（龍門村）
Puyi
普益

Building of the Ming and Qing dynasties in Yucun, Xingping

Rafting on the Yulong River

Photos & Article • Wong Chung Fai

Castle of Rocks on Icy Mountains

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At the foot of Muztag Peak on the Pamir Plateau lies a small city built of rocks. The only Tajik autonomous county in China, Taxkorgan is known for its interesting customs and fascinating scenery. Neighbour to Pakistan and India, it was once a key stop on the Silk Road.

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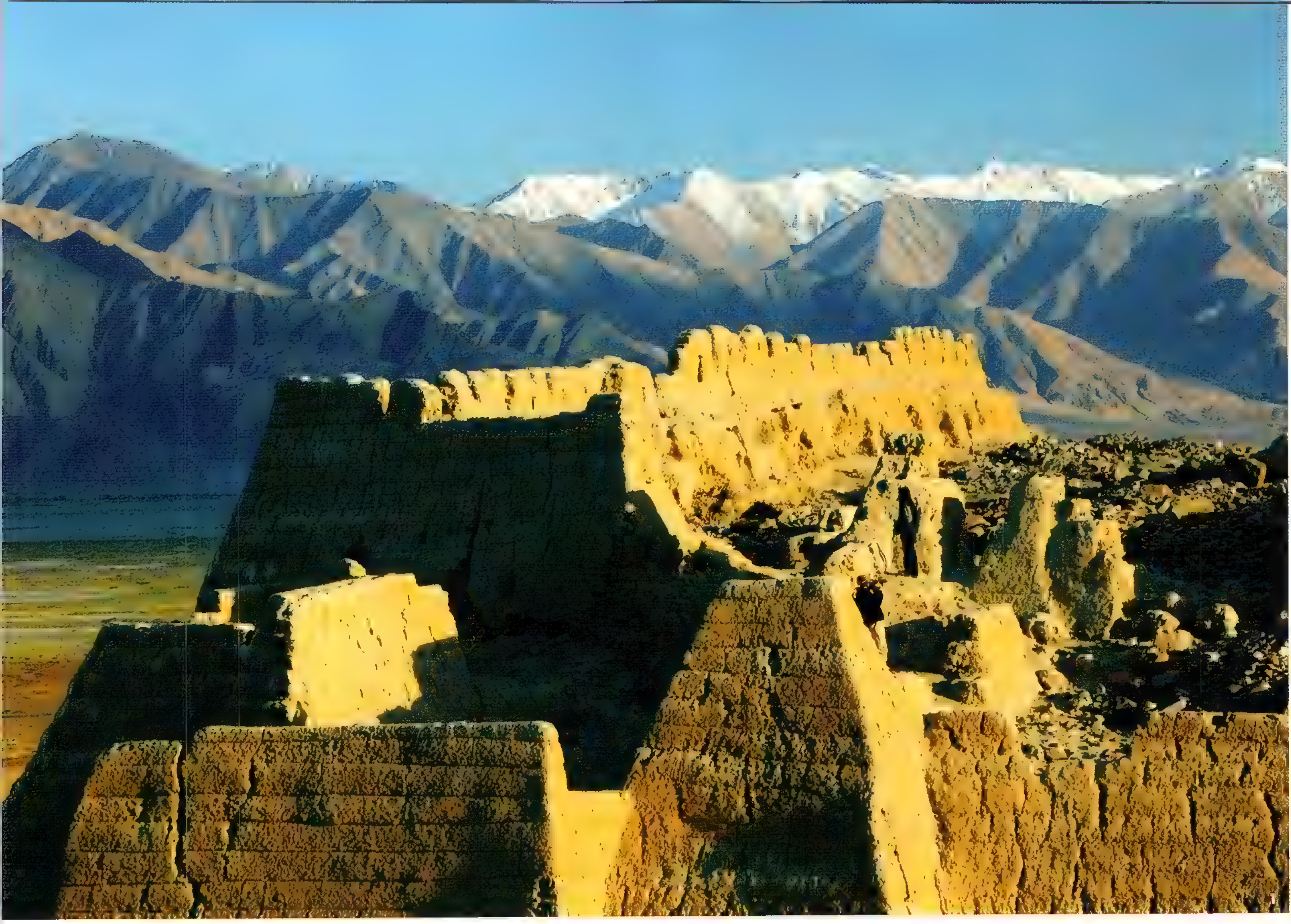
My dream of visiting the Tajik people of the Pamir dates back some 30 years, but it finally came true in the golden autumn of 2005. A French photographer and I hired a cross-country Mitsubishi for a rather high price. To my surprise, the road to Taxkorgan was no longer gravelled and bumpy as depicted in old movies, but covered in smooth blacktop, so what was once a two-day journey took only six to seven hours. The border check was also easier than expected. In the past both overseas and Chinese tourists had to obtain a border pass from Kashi's customs. Now, only mainland Chinese still need the pass (free from the bureau), while a passport or "Home Return Permit" will do for overseas visitors.

Straddling Borders Amid Snow-clad Peaks

As mellifluous Uygur music played, we drove up into mountains with an average altitude of 3,000 metres. The 7,546-metre Muztag Peak, "the father of



the snow-capped mountains", soon came into view. Snow crowns the peak year round and the gleaming white glacier is a landmark for the region, a sacred mountain worshipped by the locals. At the base of the peak lies Lake Karakul, the renowned scenic spot where most tourists stay for at least a night to see the marvellous evening glow over the lake and watch the glorious sunrise over the peak.

The Pamir is known for its diversified minority customs and splendid plateau scenery. Taxkorgan, lying to the east on the Pamir Plateau, has many high summits. Of the 11 peaks in Xinjiang open to tourists, the four snow-clad, 8,000-metre-plus mountaintops are all in Taxkorgan County. About 100 km from the county seat is Kunjirap, a major port open to Pakistan. The county is adjacent to Afghanistan in the southwest and Tajikistan in the west.

In ancient times, Taxkorgan was a major stop at the western end of the China section of the Silk Road. Over the centuries, it has been a key business channel linking China with Central and Western Asia. Today, goods are exported to neighbouring countries through the trading passes such as Kunjirap. Fully loaded trucks can be seen travelling the mountain roads, the words "border trade" printed on the sides.

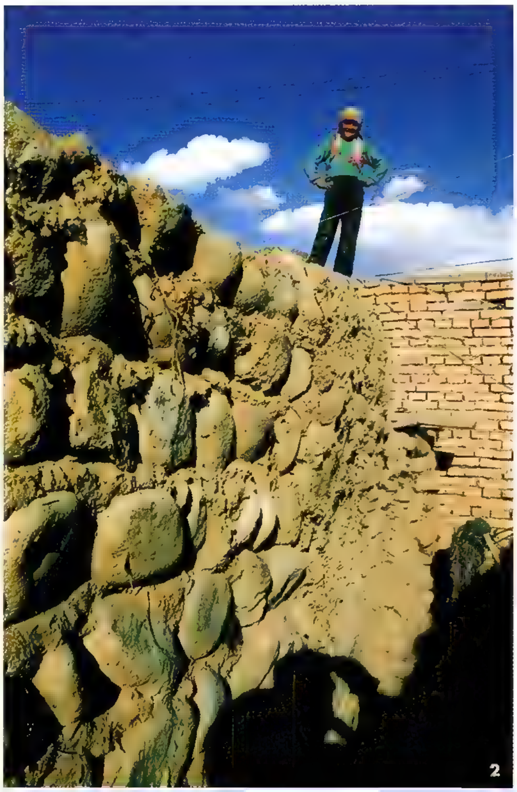
Most tourists making their first trip to Taxkorgan visit the boundary monument at Kunjirap to be photographed standing with one foot in China and the other in Pakistan. "When in Rome..." But as we were headed to the border, we were sad to learn that Pakistan had been hit by a serious earthquake. While the disaster didn't affect Taxkorgan several hundred kilometres away, the port of Kunjirap was temporarily closed.

One of 36 Han Dynasty Kingdoms

According to our local tour guide, "Taxkorgan" is a Tajik word for "castle of rocks". The ruined castle sat at an altitude of 4,000 metres on the mountain slope northeast of the county proper, quite near our hotel. Covering 100,000 square metres, the small oval structure is strategically positioned, its adobe walls built on a base of rocks. Following a zigzagging path, we rounded the craggy base and entered the tumbledown castle through a breach in the wall. Out of breath from our climb, we realized it would have been even more difficult for ancient people toting heavy weapons to attack the edifice.

The castle was once the capital of the Puli Kingdom, one of the 36 kingdoms in Xiyu (Western Regions), a Han Dynasty (206 B.C.—24) term for the area west of the Yumen Pass and including what is now Xinjiang and parts of Central Asia. During the reign of the Jiepantuo Kingdom, the city was expanded. When the Tang Dynasty (618—907) unified the Western Regions, an administrative headquarters was set up here. The early days of the Mongols' reign in the 13th century brought large-scale construction. When the Manchu replaced the Mongols, they successively established Puli Department and Puli County here. The existing structures are mostly Qing Dynasty (1644—1911) ruins.

Daylight lasts a long time in Taxkorgan. Even in late autumn, the sun rises at 6 or 7 a.m. (local time is two hours behind Hong Kong) and doesn't set until 8 p.m., hence its nickname "city of sunshine". But the long hours of sunlight can't drive away the long, harsh winter. Strong winds and heavy snows often plunge the temperature to -30°C. The fortitude of this great nationality stands in contrast to the tough living conditions.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Hospitality Tajik-style

As I strolled past the homes in a Taxkorgan village, I was surprised to see that none of the doors were bolted. Taxkorgan may be one of the few places in the world where people needn't worry about burglars, even at night.

Taxkorgan is the only autonomous county in China where the Tajik live in a compact community. Aside from a small number of Kirgiz residents, the Tajik make up a majority of the county's population of 40,000. They have their own language, but they seem to prefer Uygur. Living a semi-nomadic life, they mainly earn their keep by stockbreeding and farming.

Far from unsociable and eccentric, the Tajik are extremely hospitable and polite. They receive visitors warmly, whether acquaintances or strangers, and make them feel at home. On the vast plateau, both villages and individual dwellings resemble beans dropped on the huge mountains, but the sparse homesteads of Taxkorgan are like flowers scattered across a field. Perhaps because they live so far from one another, whenever they meet in passing, they stop and unload their horses, take out their *nang* (a kind of crusty pancake popular in Xinjiang) and air-dried mutton and share a stiff drink in the harsh wind. After a short time, they bid farewell again. Such hospitality and friendliness moved me deeply during

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Previous page:

1. Along with snow-crested mountains and limpid lakes, the Pamir also offers fresh air and complete relaxation.

2. Hospitable as they are, Tajik girls are quite shy before the camera.

3. This luxurious structure is actually the grave of a deceased Muslim. It is more splendid than the dwellings of the living.

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1. The Castle of Rocks, the landmark of Taxkorgan, in the setting sun.

2. Rocks are the main building materials in Taxkorgan, providing shelter from winter's fierce winds and snow.

3. Sunrise at the base of Muztage Peak, "the father of the snow-capped mountains", draws visitors from afar.

my stay at Taxkorgan.

When they meet, the Tajik never forget their etiquette. Usually, they lean their upper body forward and show their palms to a guest. This courtesy and their traditional greetings often surprise outsiders: How are you feeling? How is your family? How are your sheep? And your cattle? Similar questions will be asked twice: once before settling on the *kang* (a heated brick bed in North China) and again after everyone has sat down. When asked on the *kang*, the guest stands up to return the salute. Outsiders, those from bustling cities in particular, may find such greetings overly elaborate and unnecessary, since they probably never greet even long-term next-door neighbours, let alone ask after their welfare.

During the wedding season in September and October, feasts are held almost daily, with much merriment. Songs are sung to the beats of tambourines, liquor and wine are drunk, jokes are played on the bride and the wedding is celebrated in the bridal chamber.

Guests take part in a traditional game of trying to seize a sheep while riding on horseback. The riders race and scramble to nab the "sheep" (usually only a sheepskin). Raising clouds of dust, the spectacle can resemble a fierce ancient battle scene. The winner is treated like a hero. If the host is wealthy and generous, the prize may be a colour TV set.

Handsome Hawks

Tajik is known as "the nationality of the hawk", and the bird of prey is their heroic symbol. Their high noses and gray-blue eyes make them highly photogenic. With eyesight as keen as a hawk's, the young Tajik men are handsome with strong physiques. There is indeed something of the hawk about them as they nimbly snatch sheep, skilfully play the hawk-bone flute or deftly perform a hawk dance.

Tajik girls are some of the most beautiful I've ever met. Free of makeup, these tall, slim angels look healthy and natural with their blue-green eyes, high noses, charming smiles and rosy "plateau cheeks".

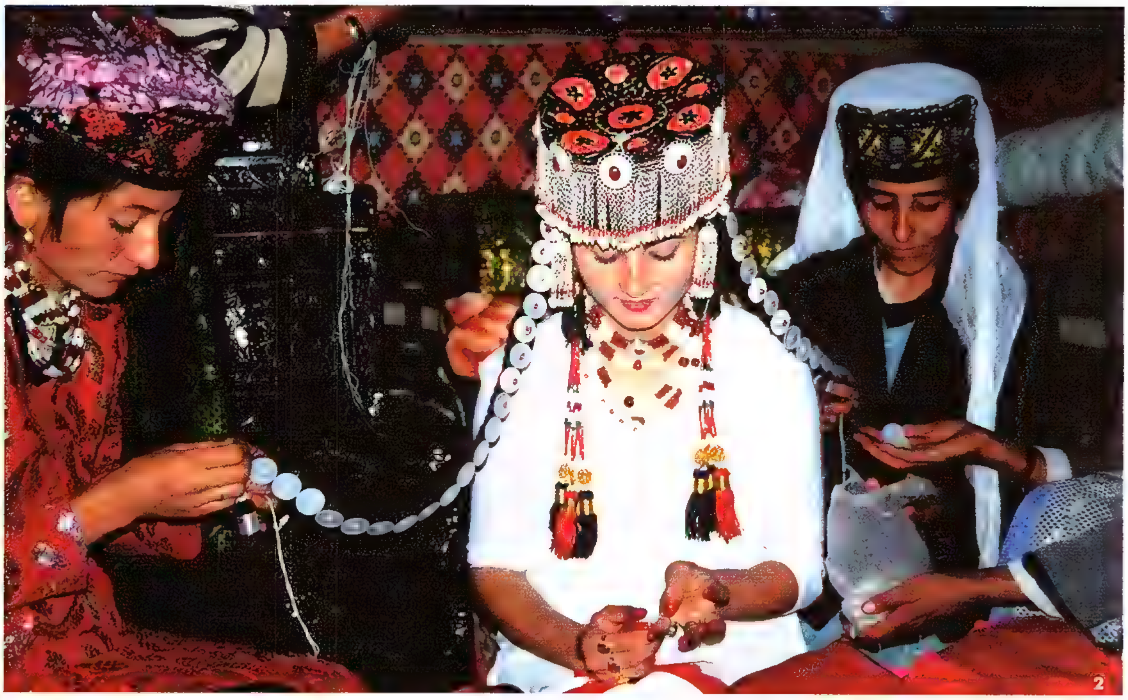
You'd be hard-pressed to find an unattractive Taxkorgan woman.

The small, round red-velvet caps worn by the Tajik women feature fancy embroidery on the brim and flat top. These exquisite handmade caps can fetch as much as 300 yuan, a boon for local artisans.

Light in a House of Rocks

Tajik clothing and accessory shops do a good business in Taxkorgan, and most of the women wear red. It's understandable; the colour punctuates their love of life in an otherwise desolate, yellowed environment.

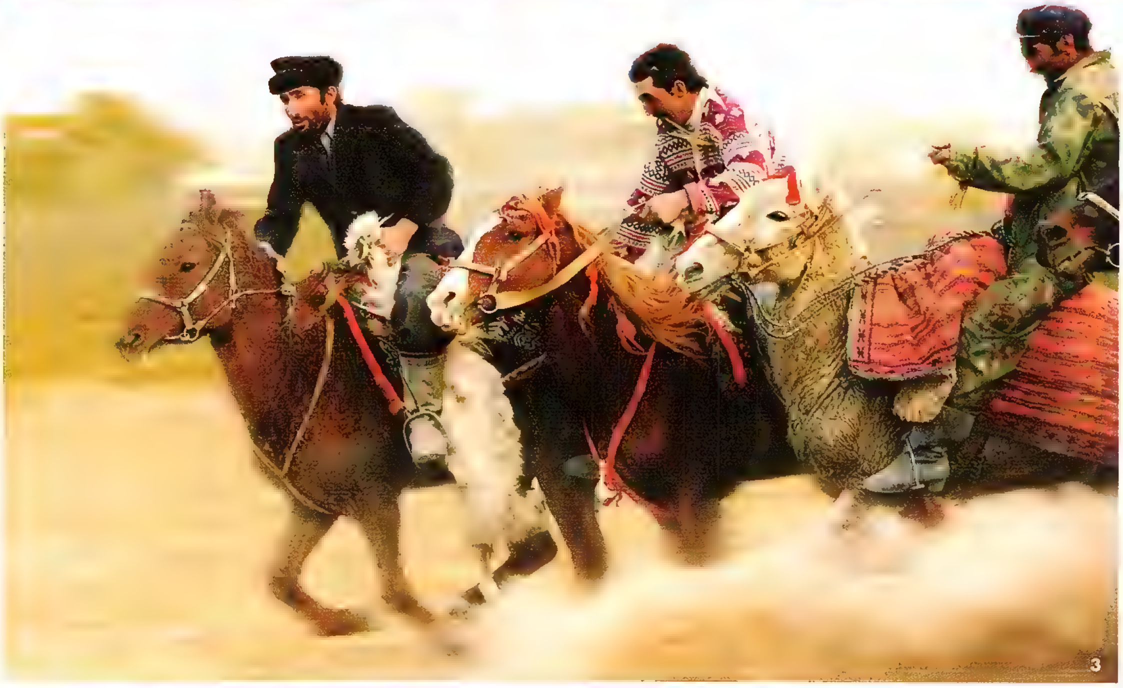
To resist the strong winds and snows of winter, houses on the Pamir are usually built low and solid. The base and walls are of rocks coated with thick mud. The roof is usually supported by several pillars and crossbeams, and covered with straw mixed with mud. All of the basic but useful materials are collected on the spot. Seen from outside, the house resembles a matchbox made of clay. But inside it is bright and spacious with simple furnishings. Light enters through a skylight in the centre of the roof. With few windows in the walls, the small overhead opening admits sufficient daylight. During the day, this natural "searchlight" moves slowly along as the sun moves and stays "lit"



1. The plateau at Taxkorgan.

2. A Tajik bride dresses for her wedding. (by Huang Gongdu)

3. The sheep "rodeo" reflects the agility and fortitude of the "nationality of the hawk".



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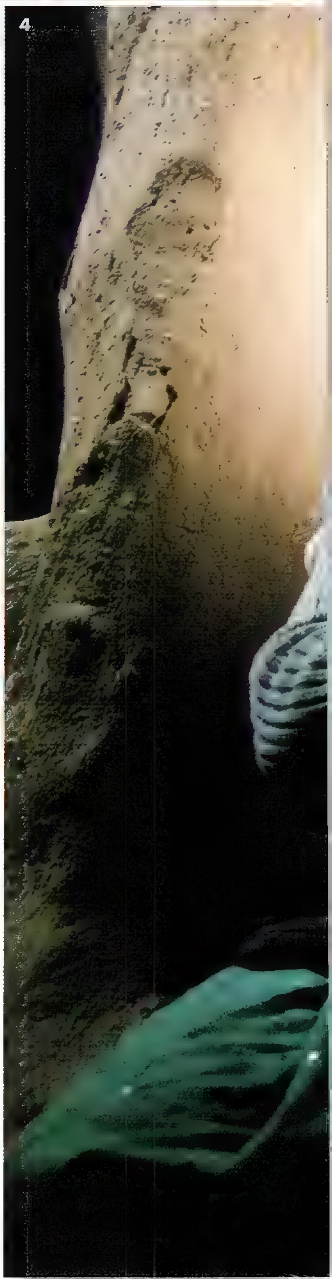

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until the sun goes down.

The living room, bedroom and kitchen each have their own skylight. Along the walls in the bedroom is an earthen kang covered with blankets, on which the elderly, guests and the younger generation sleep separately. Red blankets are hung on the walls above the kang, their bright hue reminiscent of a bridal chamber. The dine-in kitchen is usually big enough to accommodate a large number of guests for wedding feasts. The cooking range sits in the corner, fuelled by straw, twigs and dung. When meals are served, the family sits on the ground according to seniority. The food may not be sumptuous, but the milky tea imparts the warmth of a large, close-knit family.

There are hardly any modern fixtures in a Tajik home and very few electrical appliances (since the place is short of energy, the power available is used only for lighting, and many families use solar energy to heat water and light their homes). As I looked around at the surprisingly simple house, the old saying "less is more" came to mind.

It was a great pleasure to visit a Tajik family.

1. Even in autumn, beautiful scenery similar to that of southern China can be seen on the plateau some 4,000 metres above sea level. (by Huang Gongdu)

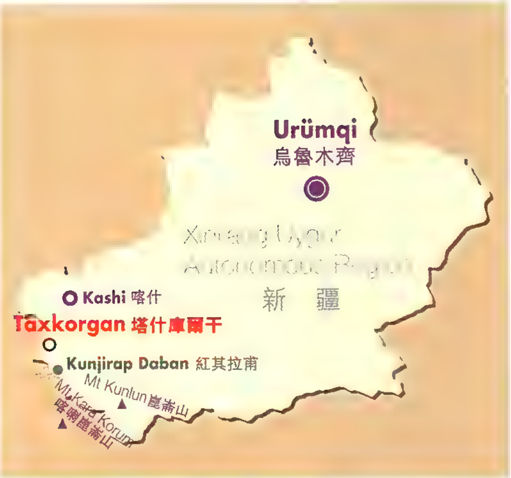
2. A silhouette of two sisters in their courtyard.

3. The hawk-bone flute is a traditional Tajik instrument.

4. Tajik families are the most harmonious of the minority families I've visited. May such harmony enlighten us city folk?

Sitting on the red blanket on the warm kang, sipping hot milky tea served by the host, tasting the appetizing nang, and taking photos with their lovely children, I couldn't imagine anything more enjoyable.

Translated by Julia Han



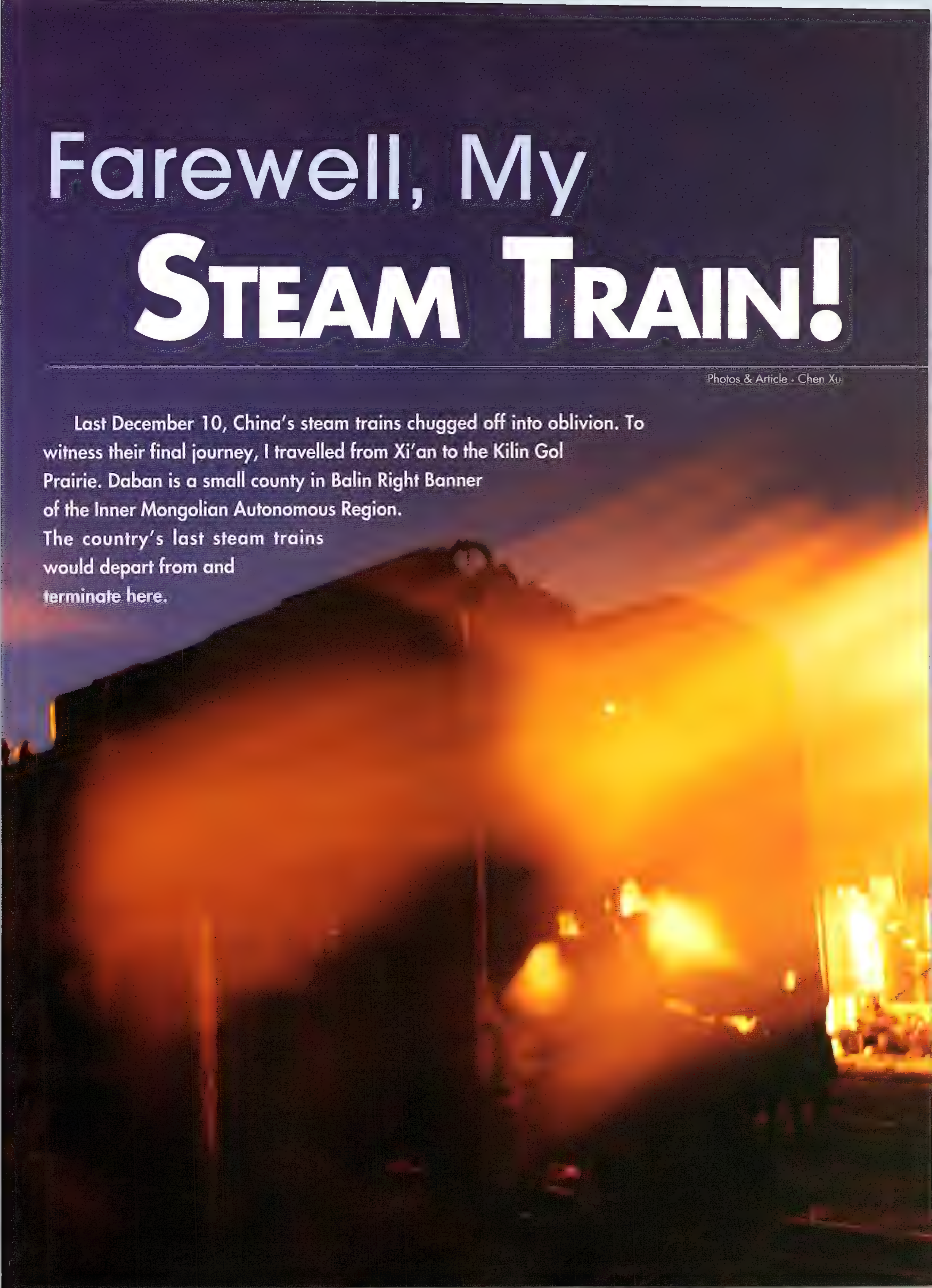
Tips for touring the Pamir Plateau:

1. The average altitude at Taxkorgan is 3,800 metres. First-time visitors may suffer altitude sickness, so please walk slowly and do not smoke or drink alcohol. Medicines such as "Hongjingtian" may be of some relief.
2. The best time to visit is August to October when the weather is pleasant. In late autumn, however, early morning and night-time temperatures are quite low and cold snaps can bring October snows, so do pack gloves and eiderdown coats.
3. Find a local tour guide and interpreter, as Mandarin Chinese is not widely spoken in the region and the local Tajik usually speak Uygur.
4. Several buses commute daily between Kashi and Taxkorgan. To save time, hire a vehicle at Kashi. Cross-country vehicle: 500 ~ 600 yuan a day (gas included); sedan car (taxi): 400 ~ 500 yuan a day. (To find a vehicle or a tour guide at Kashi, call Ai Sanjiang at 998-2553 445).
5. Taxkorgan does not have many hotels, but conditions are quite good and all offer views of the snow-clad mountains. Rates are affordable: 150 yuan for a standard room with outdated facilities.

Farewell, My STEAM TRAIN!

Photos & Article · Chen Xu

Last December 10, China's steam trains chugged off into oblivion. To witness their final journey, I travelled from Xi'an to the Kilin Gol Prairie. Daban is a small county in Balin Right Banner of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. The country's last steam trains would depart from and terminate here.



Ten years ago, after the Jining-Tongliao Railway was opened to traffic, Daban was an important stop along this line. The Ministry of Railways transferred all of the country's 100 or so functional steam trains here. Daban became an unofficial steam train headquarters, housing all types of steam trains, coal and water cars and equipped with a furnace-cleaning bay and a repair shop.

Daban was a desolate place. As I walked to the Railway Station Hotel where my friends were staying, a sudden gust of wind sent sand and small stones whirling around. I stumbled on as the sandstorm worsened. Once inside, I watched through the double-paned window as the entire sky turned brown.

Like Father, Like Son No More

After supper, a man named Mi Ziqiang came to chat with us. He and his father, Mi Zhongcheng, were steam train engineers. Mi Zhongcheng turned 60 this year and would retire alongside the steam train he had driven for more than 30 years, while his son was confronted with changing from the steam-driven train to a gas-powered one. Mi Ziqiang said his father had taught him how to drive the steam trains, but their mutual retirement made for a sad story. Neither he nor his father talked at home anymore because the steam train, their one daily topic of conversation, would soon be gone forever. Mi Ziqiang was now learning to drive the gas trains, but the family was still downhearted at the passing of such a big part of their lives.

Mi Ziqiang hurried us on to the Daban Railway Station. As we fought our way through the sandstorm, a huge steel monster slowly rolled up with a loud whistle. White steam belched through its chimney and filled the air. Its massive steel wheels rolled on, pushing its giant body forward. The railway and my hotel were separated by a small dry gravel-strewn riverbed spanned by a bridge. The train stopped on the bridge and the whistle blew once more. As it discharged the remaining steam, it was veiled in a milky cloud. It was an awesome sight indeed. I grew up beside Yang'an Railway Station and was used to electric trains. This was the first time I'd seen a steam train in its full splendour.

Although bleak, the Daban railway was still very busy. From far away, steam could be seen rising from trains chugging along. Two rail cars stood on the Daban tracks, ready to refill the empty steam engines with coal and water. A steam train needs several tons of coal to run. While the coal was being loaded, four people emptied the slag from the furnace. As it hit the ground, the slag melted the ice on the ground, instantly evaporating it. The vapour rose from beneath the train, blended with the discharged steam and drifted on the wind.

A Heartfelt Goodbye

Ten years ago, after the Jining-Tongliao Railway was opened to traffic, Daban was an important stop along this line. The Ministry of Railways transferred all of the country's 100 or so functional steam trains here. Daban became an unofficial steam train headquarters, housing all types of steam trains, coal and water cars and equipped with a furnace-cleaning bay and a repair shop. Up to now, more than 10 steam trains had been running between Daban and Chabuga on the Jining-Tongliao route. Train enthusiasts have come from around the globe to see them. They call Daban the only operational steam train museum in the world. We took our photos of the steam trains along the 154-km Daban-Chabuga section.

The wind picked up again. Small white poplars lined both sides of the tracks. The sunset dyed the entire prairie crimson; even the steam rising from the trains turned red. Standing next to one of these giants, I was almost deafened by the roar of its engine. I headed up the mountain slope from where I could overlook the entire Daban station area. After having walked around

Previous page: Once their steam was completely discharged, these steam trains would become obsolete.

1. Steam trains consume a great deal of coal. Few men can handle the exhausting job of a stoker.

2. The last crew of the QJ-class steam locomotive No. 7081.

3. Not long after No. 7081 was fixed in the repair workshop, it was purchased by some Americans.

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To others, the steam trains may have just been big hulks of steel, but in his eyes, each was a close friend. As he contemplated his old companions, he seemed reluctant to turn away.

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the station's office buildings, I was amazed by the scene before me. On the rails stood many abandoned steam trains lined up in an orderly manner. They reminded me of wounded soldiers returned from bloody battles. No longer of use, they would be cut up and melted down. As two trains discharged their steam, someone beside me said that after they had finished and their furnaces had cooled down, the trains were done for.

I climbed onto a steam train in front of the furnace-cleaning bay to get a closer look at one of these monsters being trashed. The deep sunset red glowing eerily on the black trains painted a depressing picture and signalled the end of the industrial revolution era. Beside the wasted hulks sat brand new oil tanks to supply the gas-driven trains. They glittered beneath the setting sun and the lights coming on, posing a sharp contrast to the worn-out steam engines. The glory the steam trains once enjoyed was vanishing before my eyes.

It was dark when I got down off the train. I saw an old man walking along the railway with a torch in his hand. Every time he passed a train, he shone the light on the door and the headlamp. He seemed to be greeting old friends. It turned out to be Mi Zhongcheng, whom everyone called "Lao Mi Tou (Old Mr Mi)". He was just getting off work and came here specially to say farewell to his trains. To others, the steam trains may have just been big hulks of steel, but in his eyes, each was a close friend. As he contemplated his old companions, he seemed reluctant to turn away. He and many others had known the steam trains for decades. It was only natural he should feel nostalgic, and he was not alone in his reminiscences.

My Train Is Still Here

I met En He, a burly Mongolian, beside the

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scrapped trains. Dressed in a leather jacket and a leather peaked cap, he allowed his torch to remain on one particular train for a long time. I walked over and asked, "What are you looking at?" En He answered: "It's still here, my 6884." His voice was very soft, almost as if he were talking to a lover. He then climbed into the cab, lit a cigarette and sat quietly in the dark.

Eleven years ago, when the Jining-Liaotong Railway was still under construction, it needed to pass through the Kilin Gol Prairie. The railway hoped to take possession of the grasslands at the hamlet of Halu to build the Daban service station there, but the land had already been allocated to En He. The developers came to Halu and asked if En He would like to work for them. En He, now 32, was a wrestler at the time. He asked, "Can I still be a wrestler if I become a railway worker?" They laughed and said it would not be a problem. He could not imagine how the land he had grown up on would look after the railway was built. The railroad recruited 11 other young men in Halu, including He's brother. In this small hamlet of 20 households and some 80 residents, the sudden departure of a dozen young men had a big impact. Their peaceful farming life changed completely. As the Daban service station took shape, simple brick apartments were built for the workers; En He was given a large one with a courtyard since it had been his pasture. He raised some cows and sheep in the courtyard.

At the new station, all the train terms were in Chinese. En He, who spoke only Mongolian at the time, had never learned these complicated characters. Fortunately, he had muscles, so he chose to work as a stoker. For 10 years, from 1996 to 2005, he was a steam train stoker. He said that Chabuga, 154 km from Daban, Haoluku, 204 km away, and Daban itself made up his universe. Every day, he shovelled 12 tons of coal into the furnaces. The new job was hard for him as he was used to a freer kind of work, not a structured job with rules. At first, he hated the gruelling routine, but after a year, he grew accustomed to it.

The developers kept their promise to En He;

1. Tourists can buy a train worker's helmet for 500 yuan.

2. Steam trains run through the Kilin Gol Prairie in winter.

3. Years later, who will still remember the steam train?

4. The crew of steam train No. 7038 prepares to work in wind and snow.

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As the train spouted its steam for the last time, it seemed to gasp a giant sigh of despair. Everyone kept silent; only the hissing of the steam could be heard.

One hour later, I stepped outside into a heavy snowfall. I felt as if I was walking through a huge train cemetery.

he attended the wrestling competition at the Nadam Fair every July and August on behalf of the Jining-Liaotong Railway. Aside from representing the railway at the fair, his other important task was to spread the idea of the importance of steam trains and railways among farmers. The steam trains gradually changed En He's and many other farmers' lives. In that 10-year span, thanks to the railway, En He learned to speak Chinese fluently, and Balin Youqi developed into a prosperous city. Now that his stoking job is obsolete, he is transferring to the oil depot to become a fireman.

The Final Witness

Having spent a good deal of time at the Daban service station, we got to know all the workers. Anytime there was a steam train around, we would climb into the cab and chat with the engineers or even work with them in the cramped, narrow cabs. One day, I jumped on a steam train and noticed that it was nothing like the other trains I had seen before. I soon discovered it was the No.6981, a QJ-class pusher train. Only a highly qualified and reliable engineer could run it. Inside the cab, the engineer, Lan Ying, the co-engineer, Su Jianjun, and the stoker, Bao Weiguo, worked as a team, shuttling back and forth between the Daban service station and other train stations to organize train cars into groups.

Over the next few days, we rode with them. Lan Ying said, "I've been a steam train engineer for more than 20 years. The last steam train will disappear from use during my employment." Two pusher trains operated out of the Daban service station. During our visit, one was in Daban and the other in Chabuga. According to the

schedule, these two pusher trains would be the last to be retired. Lan Ying and the other two men would no doubt be the last people to ride the steam trains of China.

But something happened on the night of November 24, 2005. Lan Ying and his team had been on duty, working the whole night through. At 6 a.m., I was dozing off in the co-engineer's seat when a loud explosion jolted me awake. Steam quickly enveloped us; we couldn't see a thing. Lan Ying and his crew jumped off the train immediately to check things out. A caliduct (a pipe or duct used to convey hot air or steam) had burst and leaked. They drove the train to the Daban service station right away, but there was only one hour left before the night shift ended. The repair crew didn't want to start fixing it as they were about to go off work. The men came to a compromise and got another steam locomotive to substitute. But this unexpected episode delayed Lan Ying for several more hours. Around 9 a.m., Lan Ying and his assistants finally finished their work. They still needed to drive the substitute train back to Daban, but there was no route open for them. The exhausted locomotive team had to fight with the people working at the train station to get a way in. The solution was to connect the substitute train to several coal cars and drive backwards to the coal shop. From there the next shift could take over. As he got off the train, Lan Ying told me, "In the past ten years, this is the first time that I have had to switch trains halfway through a run. I guess the steam trains really are too old."

In mid-December, several months earlier than expected, Lan Ying bid farewell to his steam train. A friend told me later that Lan Ying was training to become a gas-driven train engineer but was having a hard time of it. I was amazed to learn that when it came to these new trains, an otherwise highly qualified engineer could be all thumbs.

A Longer Journey Ahead

At 12:40 a.m. on November 28, the QJ steam locomotive No. 7081 pulled passenger train No. 6052 back from Chabuga. Like a funeral procession, it slowly passed the other steam trains on its way to the train-washing workshop, just 600 metres from Chabuga. Some 20 minutes later, No. 7081 arrived at the workshop gate. During that short journey, the engineer sounded the whistle continually. Engineer Liu Haimin told me, "This is the last bath for 7081. After this, it will become a lump of wasted steel."

1. The snow-covered Daban service station.

2. A UK-made steam train preserved by Daban service station.

Two workers held the gate open for the engineer to drive the train in. The old workshop would still be used by the gas-driven trains, but the furnace-washing technicians and workers would all be laid off. Everyone was forlorn as the 7081 drove in. As soon as the train stopped, the technicians took over from the engineer and discharged the steam. The director of the workshop, who had been on holiday, also came back in full uniform to attend the last cleaning of No. 7081. The engineer and his two assistants who were already off work stayed to watch as well. As the train spouted its steam for the last time, it seemed to gasp a giant sigh of despair. Everyone kept silent; only the hissing of the steam could be heard.

One hour later, I stepped outside into a heavy snowfall. On this night, nature held a white funeral for the steam train. Snowflakes cloaked the abandoned trains, now silenced forever. I felt as if I was walking through a huge train cemetery. But just over a month later, some Americans purchased three of the steam trains, including No. 7081, and shipped them to the US.

An Era Ends

I returned from Chabuga to Daban by bus. When I arrived at the Daban service station that afternoon, everyone was busily preparing for the ceremony on December 10. A crane lifted a coal and water car and a steam train to an elevated railway where they might be displayed for posterity. The trains had been painted and shined up, but the facelifts were merely for the exhibit. The crane's cables had left two deep

China's steam train lines had started more than 100 years after those in more developed nations, while their use died out more than 50 years after it did in most of those same countries. Still, it took only three days to dismantle a steam train. Sadly, though we didn't see their birth, we witnessed their end.

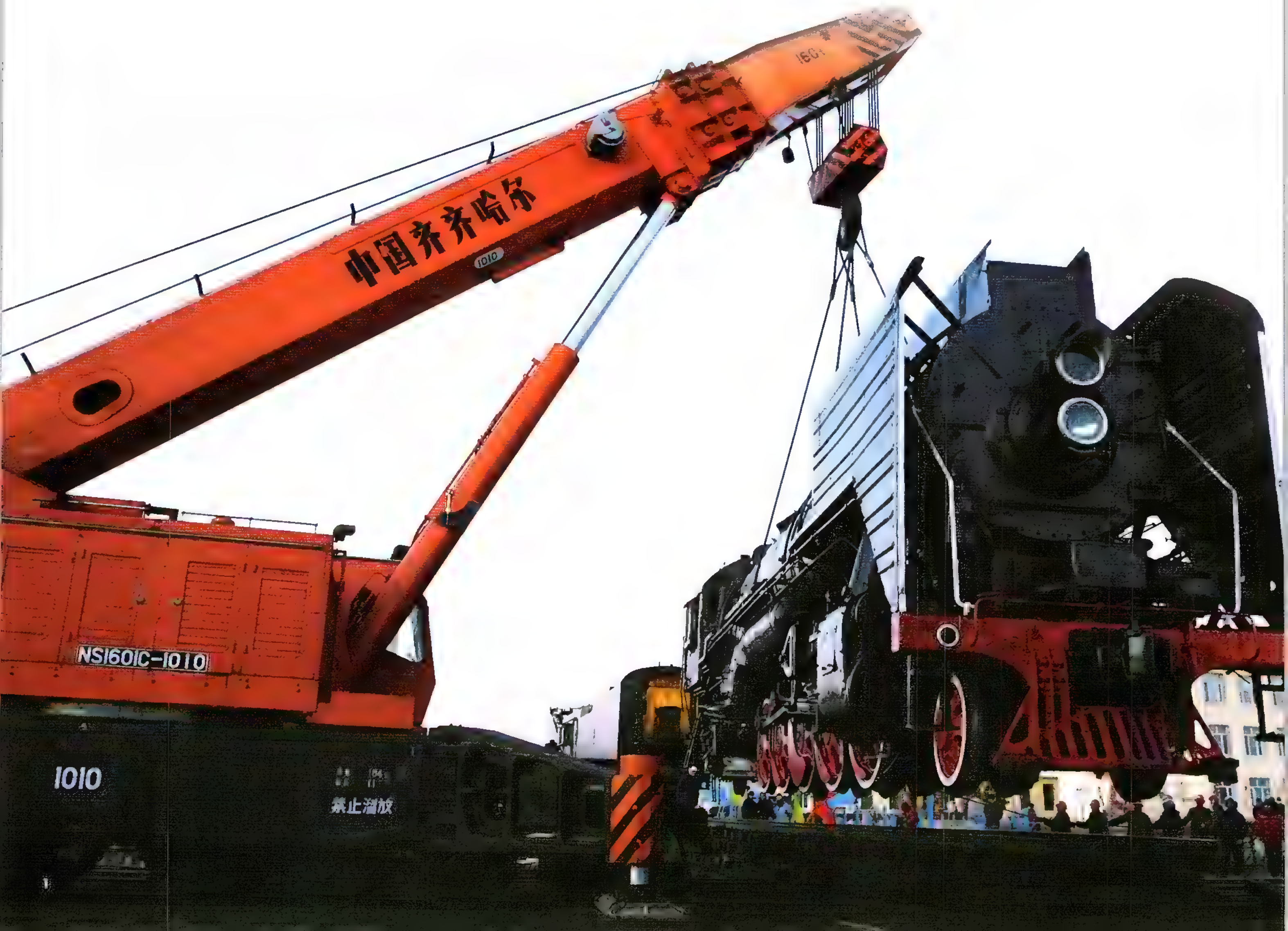
grooves in their bodies, but this was minor damage compared to what would have awaited them in the dismantling process. Someone could be seen climbing around the steam train and lighting firecrackers in homage.

The scene reminded me of when steam trains first came to China. Hendrik Willem Van Loon wrote in his 1921 book, The Story of Mankind, "As for trains, the struggle between the Chinese people and the railway developers lasted longer than that in any other country because the Chinese revere their ancestors. They were afraid that the rumbling noise would disturb their ancestors under the ground. In 1875, when the Songhu Railway, some 10 miles long, was being constructed, the local Chinese residents strongly opposed it, so construction had to stop." Amazingly, attitudes today are completely different.

Back at the hotel, my friend said China's steam train lines had started more than 100 years after those in more developed nations, while their use died out more than 50 years after it did in most of those same countries. Still, it took only three days to dismantle a steam train. Sadly, though we didn't see their birth, we witnessed their end. On December 10, 2005, the last of Daban's steam trains blew their whistles in unison and said goodbye forever.

Translated by Nicole Ouyang

1. The QJ-class steam locomotive is ready to be exhibited at the Daban service station.



TOURISM POSTMARKS

A Mark of Memory

With their pictures of famous tourist spots and commemorative appeal, the postmarks are like a tour guide taking us on a feast of famous mountains and rivers, parks, and border areas. And for those who have actually visited the place depicted in the postmark, this is as good as a snapshot saying "I was there".

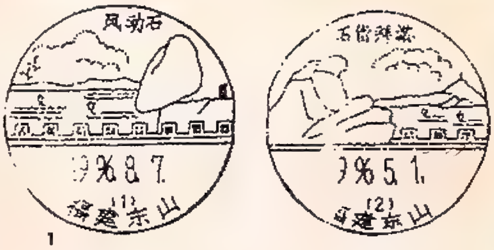
Photos & Article • Zhan Hua

In 1986, the mainland's first series of tourist postmarks was issued in Lanzhou, Gansu province. This series included postmarks featuring famous mountains, lakes and sculpture grottoes, as well as the Great Wall and Liujia Canyon Power Station.

Today it is estimated there are over 4,000 places using tourist postmarks on the mainland. Even in Dongshan County, Fujian Province, there are over 20 tourist postmark designs, making it the county with the most daily postmarks among 13 island counties nationally. These postmarks usually feature natural scenery and are another way through which to promote the local tourism industry. Postmarks stamped on top of postcards or commemorative stamps also appeal to collectors. They also record the culture, history, geography, famous people and infamous events of a locality and are a faithful document of an area's environmental record.

Translated by Bret Sutcliffe

1. The **Dongshan Wind-Eroded Stone**(風動石) is located by the sea outside the East Gate of Dongshan county town. Famous for its wonderous shape, the stone has beat over 60 wind-eroded stones to win the title of "First Wondrous Stone Under Heaven".
2. **Gulangyu (Drumming Wave) Island**(鼓浪嶼) is a famous holiday spot in Xiamen. With its lovely scenery and twisting coastline, Gulangyu Island is topped by Riguang Peak from which glorious views can be seen of the surrounding area.
3. The **Great Wall at Badaling**(八達嶺長城) is the best preserved portion of the Ming Dynasty wall and the earliest area to be developed for tourists. Located not far from the Great Wall Juyong Pass, the area is of strategic importance and has been fought over many times. In 1987, the Great Wall was proclaimed a World Heritage site.
4. **Tian'anmen Square**(天安門) in Beijing is the largest square in the world. Measuring over 440,000 square metres, the square can accommodate over one million people. To the north of the square lies Tian'anmen Gate. In 1949 Mao Zedong ascended the Tian'anmen Gate to proclaim the establishment of the People's Republic of China and thus the gate has become a symbol of modern China.
5. The **Grand View Garden**(大觀園) in Beijing was built in the 1980s and is over 8,000 square metres in size. The garden was inspired by the famous Chinese novel *A Dream of the Red Mansion* and features many places of interest built according to descriptions found in the book.
6. Located in Shunde in Guangdong province, **Qinghui Garden**(清暉園) is one of the four most famous gardens in Southern China. With its small bridges, verandahs and pavilions, the overall style of the garden is classical, simple and a representative of the ancient Chinese art of landscaping.



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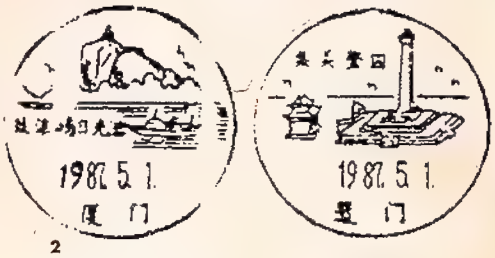

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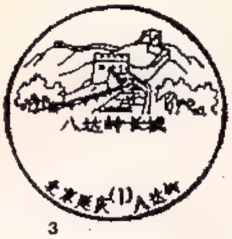

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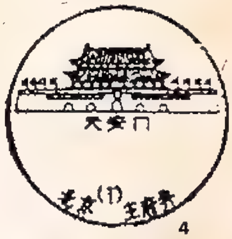

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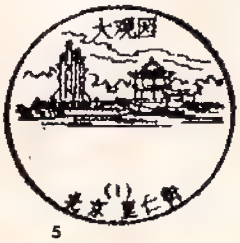

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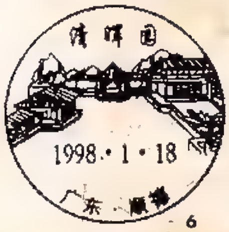


6

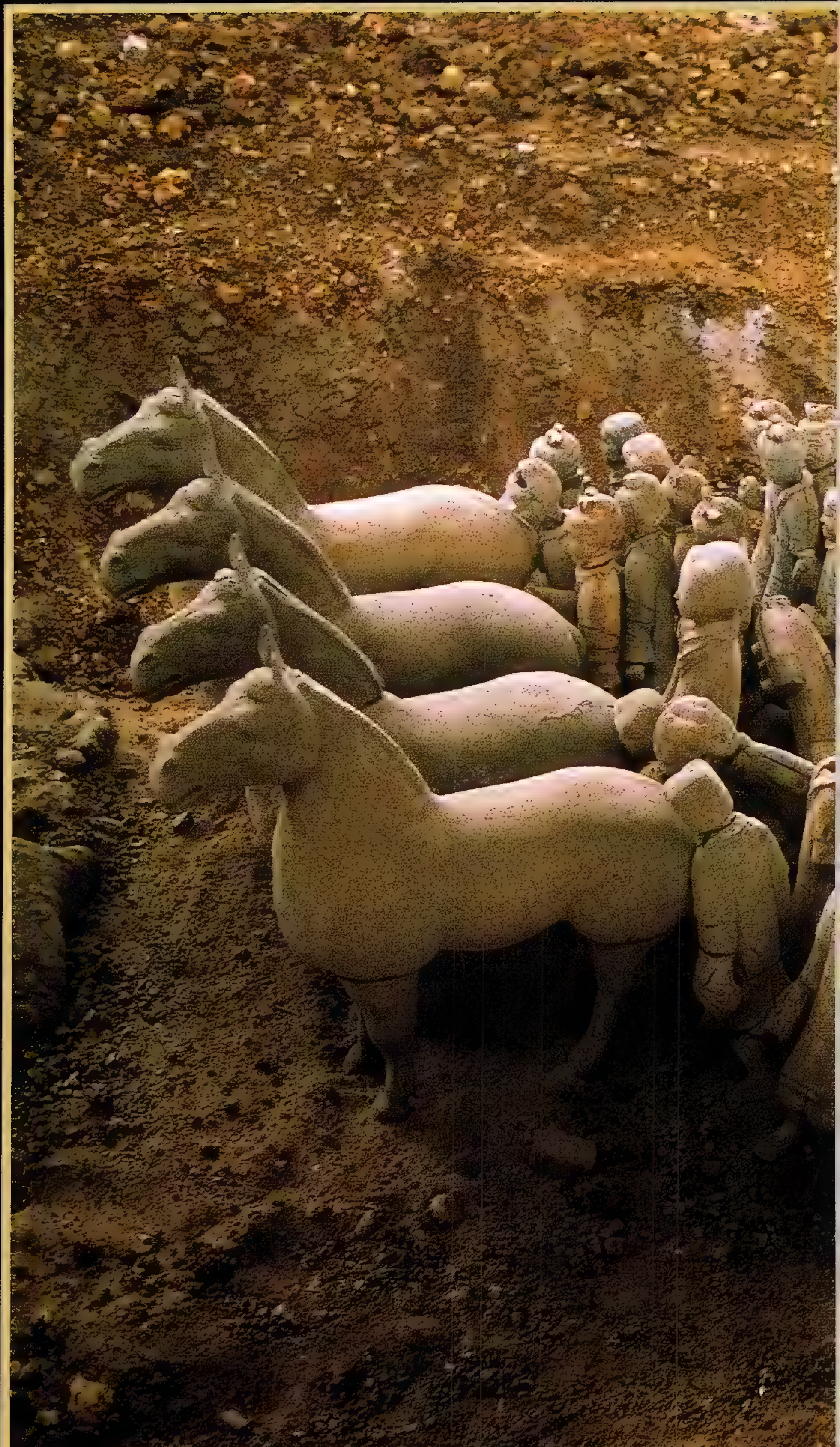
XUZHOU

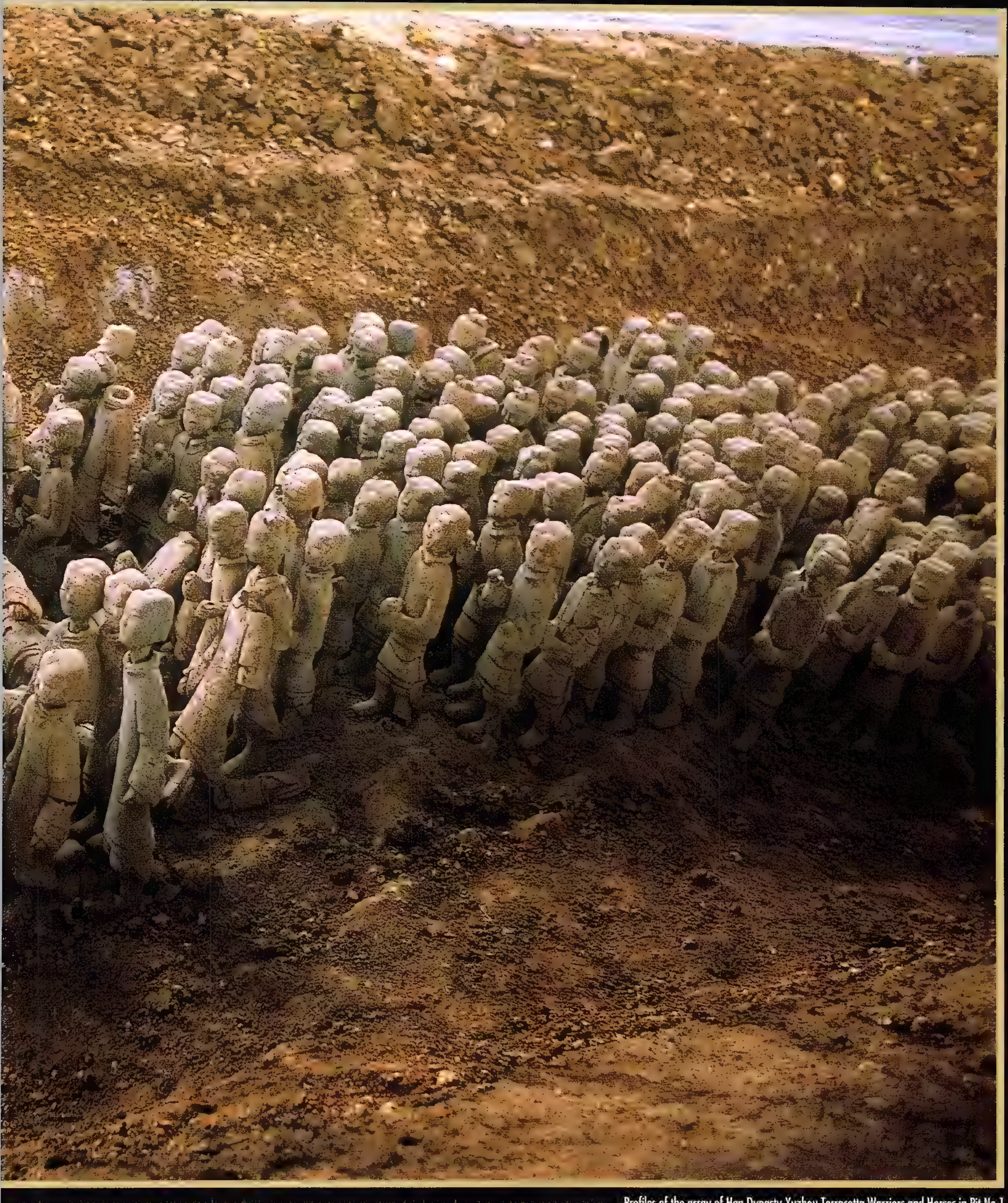
A LEGENDARY LAND OF HEROES

Photos · Zheng Yunfeng Article · Feng Jun, Ge Feng

KNOWN AS PENGCHENG AT THE OLD TIMES, XUZHOU IS LOCATED IN NORTHERN JIANGSU PROVINCE, NEIGHBORING SHANDONG AND HENAN.

A PLACE OF LEGEND AND MOMENTOUS HISTORIC EVENTS, XUZHOU HAS WITNESSED THE RISE OF MANY OF CHINA'S GREAT HEROES. SINCE THE GLORY DAYS OF THE CHINESE EMPIRE, EMPERORS AND GENERALS HAVE KNOWN THAT TO CAPTURE XUZHOU WILL ENSURE THEIR SUCCESS IN LIFE AND IN HISTORY.





Profiles of the array of Han Dynasty Xuzhou Terracotta Warriors and Horses in Pit No.1

Favours by Past Emperors

Liu Bang was known as Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.—220) after he was enthroned. Born in the state of Chu, he cherished Pengcheng (an old name for Xuzhou in today's Jiangsu Province) even after he became the emperor in Chang'an (today's Xi'an in Shaanxi Province). As a result of Li Bang's attentions, an important feudal kingdom established itself in the area around Pengcheng. During the Western and the Eastern Han dynasties, Pengcheng flourished and 13 kings of the Chu kingdom and five kings of Pengcheng established their capitals in Xuzhou. Today, Xuzhou has become an outstanding place for cultural relics thanks to the mausoleums and treasures left in the area by the emperors, kings and important ministers.

After decades of development and consolidation, the Chu-Han kingdom reached the height of its power and splendour under the rule of Liu Wu, the King of Chu. The Chu Kingdom at that time not only had a civil service and palace complex on the same scale as that in the imperial capital, but also had an independent taxation system for copper and iron products to fund its local armies. In addition, the Chu Kingdom was also a national metallurgy centre, and the Liguo Iron Mine in Xuzhou is still under operation nowadays.

In 1995, when archaeologists penetrated the mausoleum of Liu Wu at Shizi (Lion) Hill in the eastern suburbs of Xuzhou City, observers were deeply struck by the magnificent mausoleum and extremely precious cultural relics buried there. The Mausoleum of Chu Kingdom was built in accordance to that of an emperor in terms of shape and specifications, and was the same size as that of an emperor too. Xuzhou is abundant with historic cultural relics. Among the most famous are the Ximatai Platform where epic warrior Xiang Yu drilled with his horses, the former site of the battle Xiang Yu and Liu Bang at Jiuli Hill, a stele to commemorate the "Dafeng Song" (Elegy of Strong Wind) written by Liu Bang after he took the throne, and valuable artifacts such as the gold-thread jade burial robe, jade dragon figures, and royal seals of the Chu Kingdom unearthed from the Mausoleum of King Chu at Shizi Hill.

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1. Xiang Yu fled to Gaixia and committed suicide on the bank of the Wujiang River. This picture shows the ancient battlefield at Gaixia.

2. Before entering military service, Liu Bang once was a low-ranking finance officer at Sishui River. This is the Sishui Pavilion rebuilt.

3. A statue of Yu Ji and Xiang Xu. Their bitter love story has been passed down for thousands of years.

4. A statue of Liu Bang, the first Emperor of the Han Dynasty.

5. Xiang Yu used to drill his soldiers around Yunlong Hill. This picture shows the Museum of Han Stone Sculptures at the foot of the hill.

[Historic Combats Between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu]

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Located in the northwestern suburbs of Xuzhou City, Jiangsu Province, Jiuli Hill is said to be the battlefield where Xiang Yu and Liu Bang waged their decisive campaign.

How Liu Bang and Xiang Yu came to be arch rivals is the subject of a well known chain of events in Chinese history. Long before Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, Emperor Qin Shi Huang Di of the Qin Dynasty imposed cruel laws and heavy taxation upon the population after he united China, and many people had no means to live. In 209 B.C., Chen Sheng and Wu Guang launched an uprising at Dazexiang near Xuzhou. As a result of this uprising, two important rebellion forces came into being which were respectively lead by Liu Bang (256—195 B.C.) and Xiang Yu (232—202 B.C.). Eventually, Liu Bang became the first to overthrow the Qin. As early as before they had set off, King Huai of the Chu State had come to an agreement with all the feudal princes that "He who reaches the original territory of the Qin Dynasty will be enthroned". These words turned out to foreshadow the subsequent strife between the Chu (led by Xiang Yu) and the Han (led by Liu Bang) which immediately broke out into war.

After four years of war, Pengcheng, Xiang Yu's capital, finally fell to the Han troops in 202 BC. Han Xin occupied Pengcheng, and dispatched his vast army in all directions to surround the doomed Chu troops stationed at the foot of Mount Jiuli north of Pengcheng.

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Xiang Yu was forced to flee with his troops southwards where he eventually reached Lingbi. By December, the Han troops had caught up and had them surrounded at Gaixia. After a day of fierce combat, the Chu army had lost so many soldiers and become so tired that they had no morale to fight on. That night, the Han troops sang some songs native to the Chu area and, overhearing the songs, many Chu soldiers fled, their morale crushed. Deeply shocked, Xiang Yu became drunk in his camp. As he sang, his love Yu Ji performed a military dance with a sword and then, knowing the end had come, plunged the sword deep into her breast. This legend later was immortalized in the story and opera known as the "Hegemon King Farewells His Concubine".

Still committed to pushing on, Xiang Yu led 800 cavalrymen to break through the heavy siege by the Han troops, but was continually pursued and intercepted. Actually, Liu Bang had issued an order to his troops that anyone who cut off Xiang Yu's head would be conferred the title of Wanhuhou (a marquis with 10,000 households to act as his slave peasants). Fighting off the Han troops left and right, Xiang Yu fought nine battles in one single day. By the time he arrived on the bank of the Wujiang River, he and his horse had become the sole survivors. By good fortune, a guard stationed at Wujiang River had been waiting for Xiang on a boat, ready to ferry him across the river. Looking at the east side of the river, however, Xiang Yu, who was such a proud man, raised his face and sighed, "It is Heaven that wants to destroy me, so why should I cross the river? What's more, my 8,000 fellows followed me across the river from the eastern bank to the west, now none of them returns with me. Even if the fathers and brothers on the east side of the river pitied me and enthroned me, how could I have the gall to face them?" Unwilling to let his beloved horse Wuzhui die together with him, Xiang Yu told the officer to take the horse across the river, and he himself fought the arriving troops, killing many more Han soldiers. Finally cornered, wounded and exhausted, he cut his own throat with his sword on the bank of the Wujiang River.

Liu Bang, who had risen from an ordinary background, finally seized power over the whole country and was enthroned in February 202 BC. He was the first peasant to become an emperor in the history of China. As the founder of the Han Dynasty, which lasted for 400 years, he was known as Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty, and the battle between him and Xiang Yu has left many moving stories both in the history books and in folk tales told among the people.

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1. Feature on a terracotta warrior head.
2. Detail of the Han Terracotta Warriors and Horses in Pit No. 1.
3. Excavating the Han Terracotta Warriors and Horses in Pit No. 2.
4. A colour painted pottery figure unearthed from the tomb of the King of the Chu Kingdom of the Western Dynasty at Beidong Hill.
5. Back detail of a colour pottery figure known as Langguan (the title of an official post), which was unearthed from the tomb of a king of the Chu Kingdom at Beidong Hill.
6. Feature of a colour terracotta warrior carrying an arrow container, which was unearthed from the tomb of a king of the Chu Kingdom at Beidong Hill.
7. Back of an archer statue from the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of the Han Dynasty (The object on the back is a container of arrows).

THE THREE WONDERS OF THE HAN DYNASTY

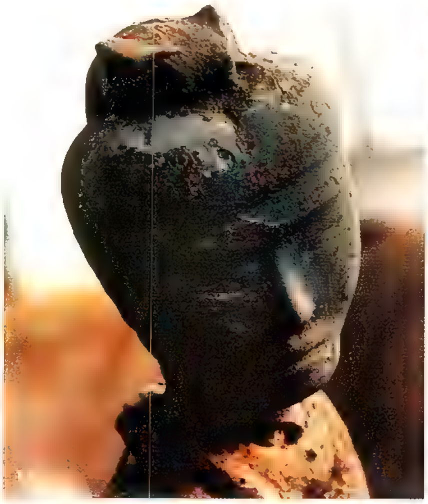
Xuzhou is abundant with underground cultural relics, but in particular, three main sights stand out: the Han Terracotta Warriors and Horses, the Han Stone Sculptures and the Mausoleum of King Chu of the Han Dynasty.

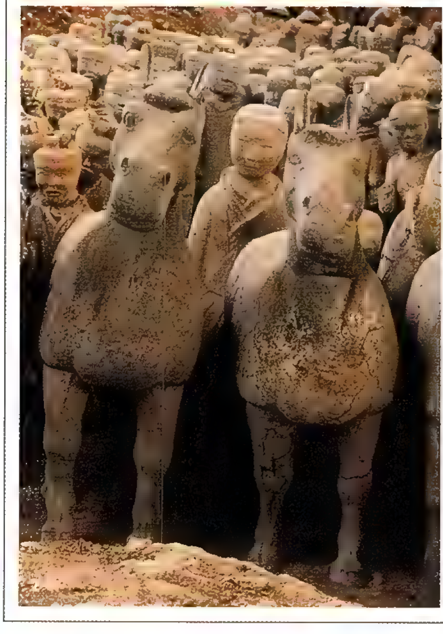
The Han Dynasty Terracotta Warriors and Horses

In December 1984, workers at a brick factory digging at Shizi Hill in the eastern suburbs of Xuzhou accidentally found an underground army of terracotta warrior statues buried for over 2,000 years. This is the Xuzhou Terracotta Warriors and Horses known today throughout China and across the world.

Divided into two groups, the vast underground battle army is lined up in 6 pits with a careful attention to order. The main array is a vast square composed of infantry and chariots. In particular, there are three columns of principal forces and a line of rear guards. The three columns of the principle forces are divided into two parts: the front part is a vanguard of densely deployed infantry, and the rear part is an array of numerous infantry and chariots. Within the right column, there is a chariot pulled by four horses, where stands a tall general. To the rear of the chariot are a throng of soldiers in armor. This is the command centre of the battle array. Not far from the right side of the main arrays are two pits with cavalry arranged in square arrays, forming the right wring of the battle arrays.

This intact battle array fully displays the strategy for ancient Chinese warfare using the four main divisions of vanguard, main body, rear and wing. Containing as many as over 4,000 terracotta figures in total, this underground army is vast and imposing. It factually shows the true appearance of the powerful army of the Chu Kingdom in the early Han Dynasty. Analysts suggest that the presence of infantry, cavalry and chariots in the tomb indicates an evolution in ancient battle arrays in ancient China from the combination of infantry and chariots to that of infantry and cavalry. As such the statues are a significant contribution to the research of ancient military development.





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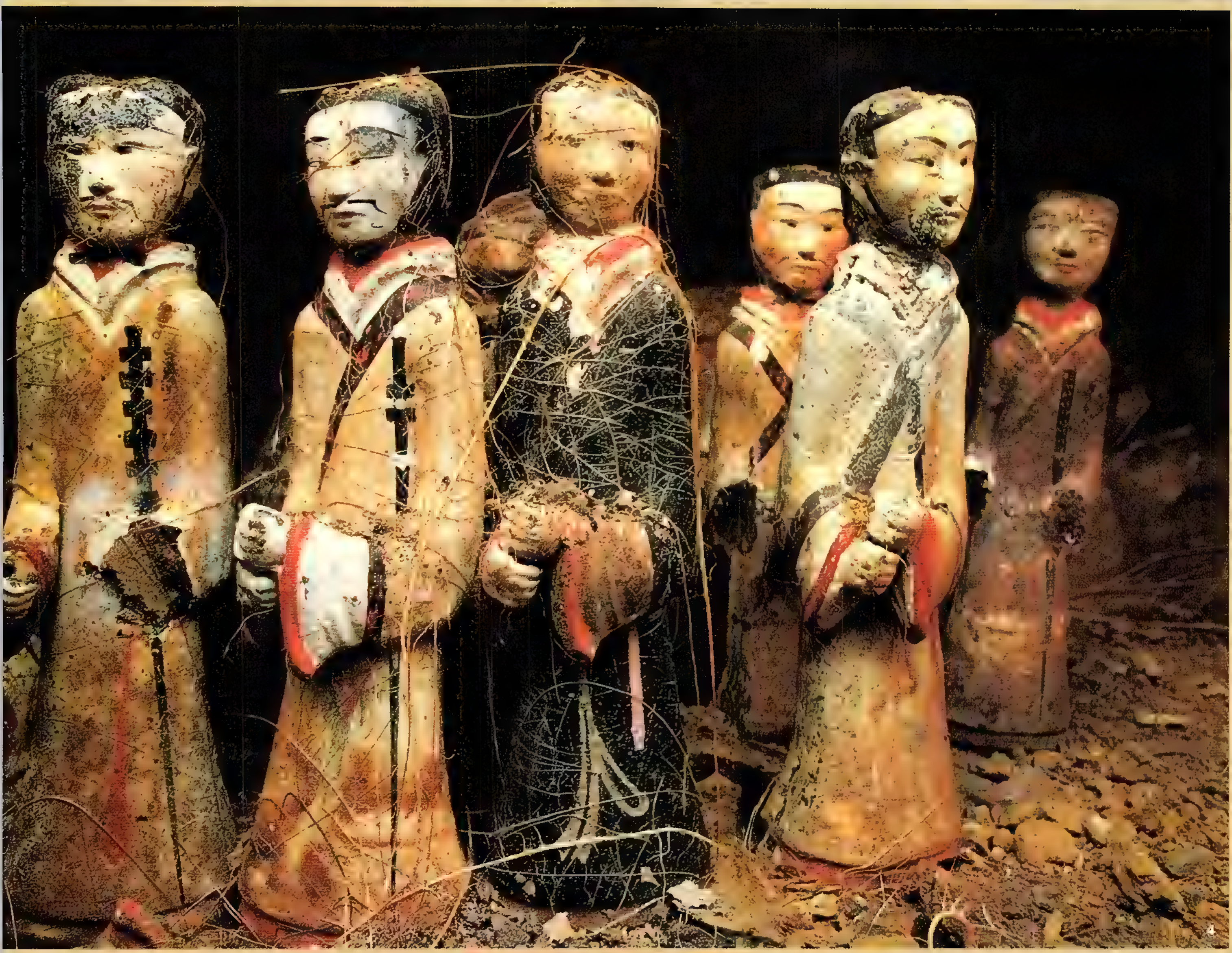

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Han Dynasty Stone Portrait Sculptures

The Han Dynasty Stone Portrait Sculptures refer to the stone sculptures on buildings such as temples, tombs and entrance structures. They are a perfect combination of ancient painting and sculpture, an important milestone in the history of the development of Chinese fine arts, and also an "encyclopedia" that directly shows the social life of the Han Dynasty. Therefore, they have been praised as a living fossil of Chinese ancient cultural heritage.

The Xuzhou Han Dynasty stone sculptures feature a variety of topics including auspicious birds and animals such as the qinglong (blue dragon), baihu (white tiger), zhuque (red bird) and the "Combats Between the Chu and the Han". In addition, there are some patterns showing social occasions such as banquets, hunting, marching horses and carriages, farming and weaving, metallurgy and foundry, and architectural construction. In particular, the picture of An Ox Pulling a Plough and the Picture of Weavers found in Xuzhou have become known to generations of school students by virtue of their selection for Chinese history textbooks. Now the original pieces are held in the China National Museum. Since these stone sculptures vividly portrayed all the aspects of the society at that time, Jian Bozan, a famous historian in China, has appraised them highly as "a history of the Han Dynasty written with pictures".

1 & 2. The interior structure and murals in the Han Dynasty stone tombs.

3. A picture of Marching Carriage and Horses — a stone sculpture from the Western Han Dynasty.

4. Inside a Han-dynasty stone mausoleum.

5. Animal patterns of the Han Dynasty stone sculptures.

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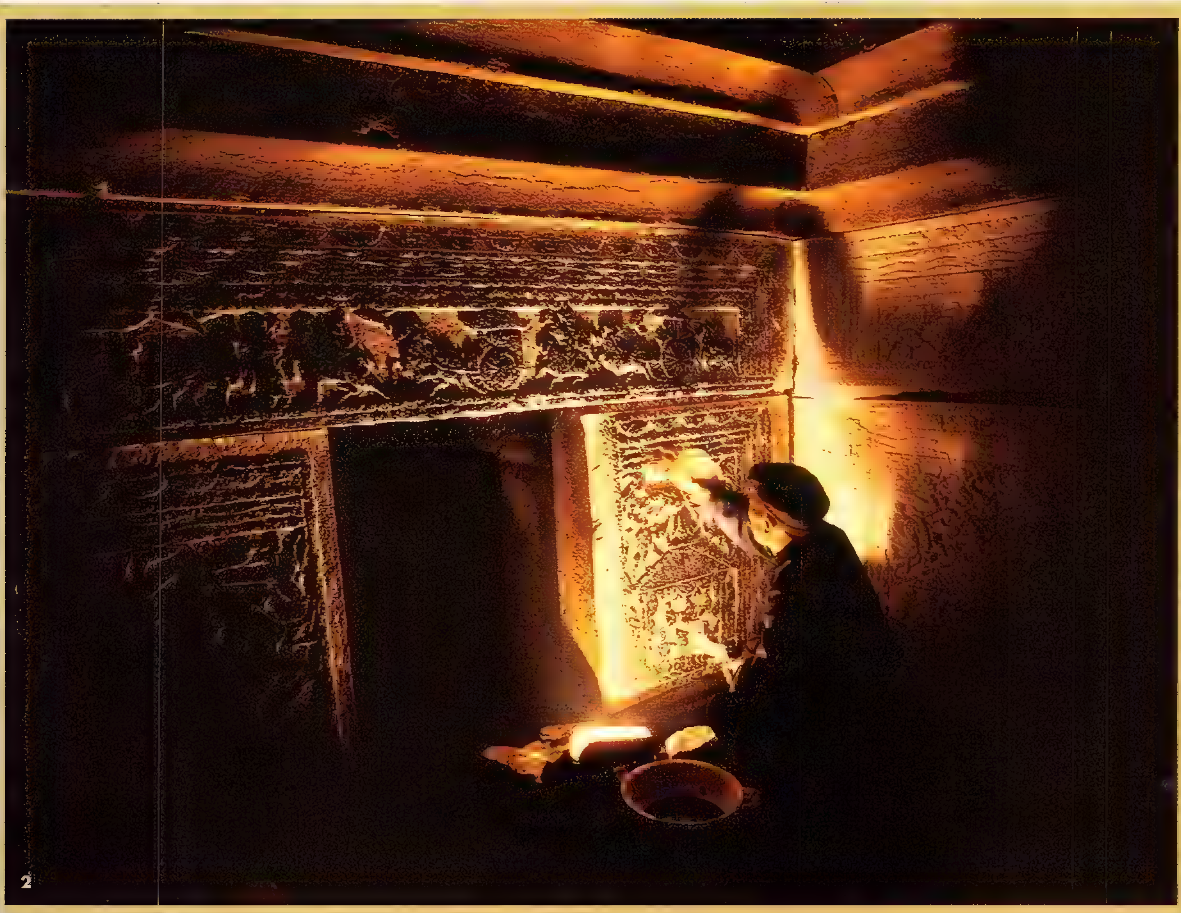
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Han Dynasty Mausoleums of the Kings of Chu

Among the three outstanding sights of the Han Dynasty in Xuzhou, the most important must be the mausoleums of the Kings of the Chu Kingdom.

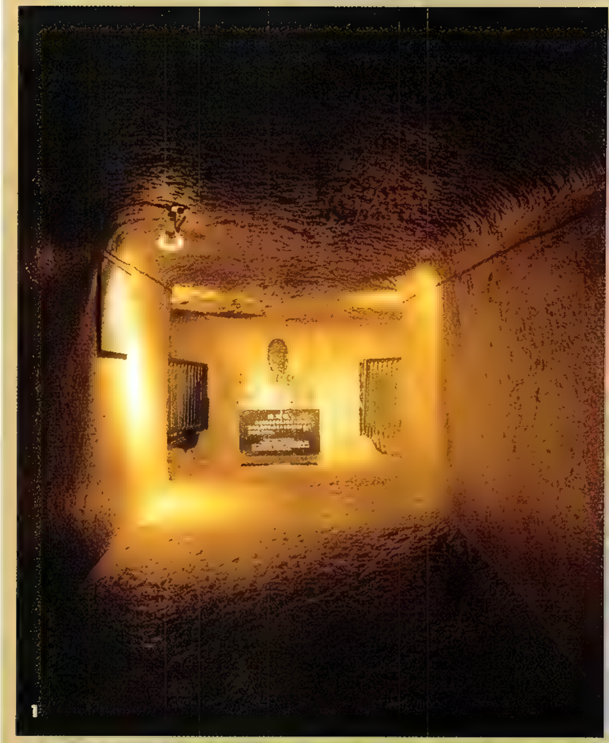
Over the 200 years of the Western Dynasty period, 12 kings of the Chu Kingdom consecutively took Xuzhou as their capitals, and then were buried in the hills surrounding Pengcheng after their deaths. After decades of archaeological work, 8 Chu Kingdom royal mausoleums have been found and unearthed, in particular, the Chuwang (King Chu) Hill, the Beidong Hill, the Shizi (Lion) Hill, Tuolan Hill, Xiaogui (Small Turtle) Hill, Dongdong (East Cave) Hill, Nandong (South Cave) Hill, and Woniu (Lying Cow) Hill. Ranging from the early Western Han Dynasty to the regime of Wang Mang, a usurper who ended the Western Han Dynasty, these tombs are the best preserved complex of Han dynasty royal mausoleums discovered in China to date.

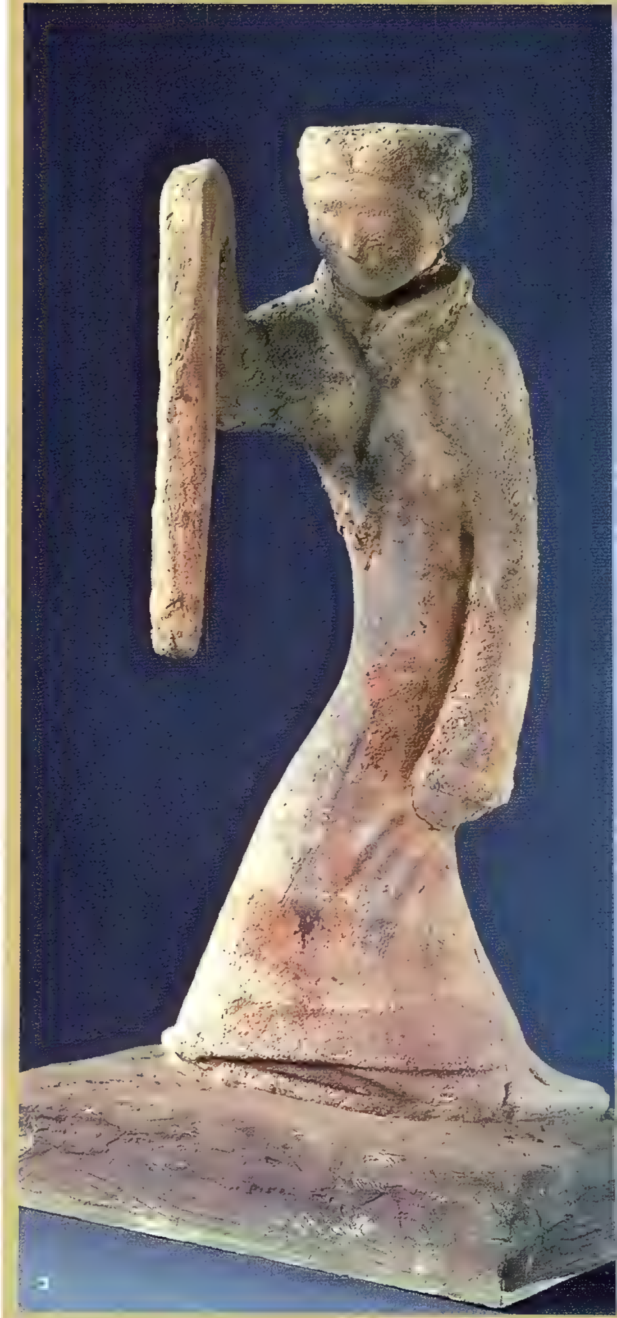
Seldom seen among the ancient royal tombs in China, the Xuzhou tombs make use of natural hills to form the tomb dome while using carved out rooms inside the cliffs for the tomb chambers. The enormous complex of tomb chambers imitates the palace where the kings spent their lifetimes. The vast chambers are labyrinthine and well equipped, including tomb channels, front halls and back chambers, as well as other functional rooms such kitchens, weapon storehouse, coin depository, concert hall and so on. Even lavatories and bathrooms have been provided! The complex is just like some vast underground palace, displaying the luxurious lives of the kings of the Chu Kingdom. Incredibly, all these exquisite royal mausoleums are completely man-made, created simply by means of hammers and chisels.

The tombs already excavated and open to visitors at Shizi Hill and Xiaogui Hill are representative of different eras. In particular, the tomb at Shizi Hill, which has been appraised as the "most important among the 10 top archaeological discoveries in China in 1995", exceeds all the other royal mausoleums already found in Xuzhou in terms of the size, amount, age, and value of the cultural relics found there. Buried as deep as over 100 metres into the mountain, this tomb has a capacity of more than 5,000 cubic metres. Since the same quantity of rocks has been excavated from the hill, the whole hill is almost completely hollow inside. The tomb is an amazing engineering feat seldom seen in any other ancient wonder in China.

Translated by Huang Deyuan

1. Exhibition hall at the Mausoleum of King Chu at Shizi Hill.
2. A colour pottery figure unearthed from the tomb of a king of the Chu Kingdom.
3. A Han Dynasty copper utensil.
4. A gold belt embedded with pieces of turquoise shaped in an animal head, unearthed from the Mausoleum of King Chu at Shizi Hill.
5. A set of bronze wares unearthed from the warehouse in the Mausoleum of King Chu at Shizi Hill.





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TRAVEL TIPS

Xuzhou Museum

Located at the northern foot of Yunlong Hill in the southern suburbs, the Xuzhou Museum holds over 1,000 pieces of cultural relics including such rarities as the gold-thread jade costume, a gold-plated animal figure ink stone and a copper ox lamp.

Add: No. 101, Heping Road, Xuzhou City

Tel: (516) 8380 4400 **Admission:** 20 yuan

Opening hours: 09:00 ~ 17:00

Transport: Buses 2 and 11, sightseeing coach (from Railway Station), Bus 35 (from Huaixi Passenger Station), Bus 608 (from town centre), alight at Zhongyiyuan stop or Xuzhou Shifan Daxue stop.

Xiangwang Xima Tai (Platform where Xiang Yu drilled his horses)

The horse-drilling platform is one of the earliest relics currently preserved in Xuzhou. After he destroyed the Qin Dynasty in 206 B.C., Xiang Yu conferred the title of Hegemon King of Western Chu on himself and chose Pengcheng as his capital. Here he had a high platform built so that he could watch his soldiers and horses drill.

Add: No. 1, Xiangwang Road, Xuzhou City

Tel: (516) 8382 7740 **Admission:** 20 yuan

Opening hours: 08:00 ~ 17:00

Transport: Bus 19, Bus 20 (from Railway Station), and Bus 65, alight at Xima Tai stop.

Mausoleum of King of Chu at Shizi Hill

Located at Shizi Hill in the southeastern suburbs of Xuzhou, lies the tomb of Liu Wu, the third king of the Chu Kindom in the early Western Han Dynasty. This tomb was hailed as the most important among the 10 top archaeological discoveries in 1995 in China for its yield of nearly 2,000 rare relics.

Add: Bingmayong Road, Third Eastern Ring Road, Xuzhou City

Tel: (516) 8356 7214 **Admission:** 25 yuan

Opening hours: 08:30 ~ 16:30

Transport: Bus 5 (from Cultural Hall), Bus 58, Bus 104 (from Railway Station), and Bus 608 (from town centre), alight at Chuwang Ling.

Shizi Hill Museum for the Terracotta Warriors and Horses

The Xuzhou Museum for the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of the Han Dynasty is built up on the same site where the terracotta warriors and horses were found. The terracotta warriors and horses of the Han Dynasty are the next most important discovery of terracotta warriors after those found in Xi'an. More than 4,000 terracotta warriors and horses have been unearthed in lines spread over 6 pits, just like a mighty underground army.

Add: No. 1, Bingmayong Road, Third Eastern Ring Road, Xuzhou City, Jiangsu, about 400 metres to the tomb of the King of Chu.

Tel: (561) 8316 7053 **Admission:** 20 yuan

Opening hours: 08:30 ~ 16:30

Transport: Bus 104 (from Railway Station), Bus 608 (from town centre), and Buses 5 and 58.

Tomb of Han Dynasty at Guishan Hill

This is the tomb of Liu Zhu, the sixth king of the Chu Kingdom, and his wife. 83 metres long from west to east, and 33 metres wide from north to south, the tomb is composed of 15 chambers in a clear primary and secondary arrangement, including a burial chamber, bedrooms, sitting rooms, a kitchen and a stable, just like a grand underground palace. A magnificent and rewarding sight.

Add: Xiangwang North Road, Jiuli District, Northwestern Suburb, Xuzhou City **Tel:** (561) 8588 1666

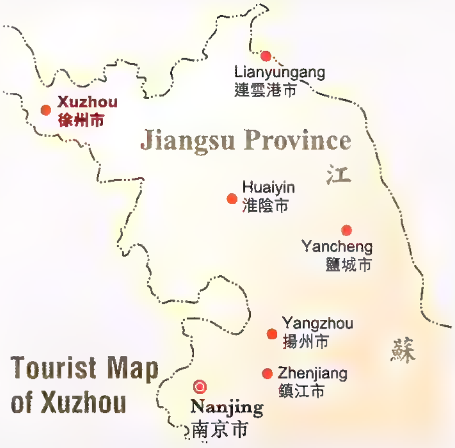
Admission: 40 yuan **Opening hours:** 08:30 ~ 17:30

Transport: Bus 13 (from Railway Station), Bus 21 (from Cultural Hall), Bus 37 (from Pengcheng Square at urban centre)

1. Martial arts have been practiced for thousands of years in Xuzhou, hometown of Gaozu, the first Emperor of Han Dynasty. This picture shows children from Chengguan Town practicing kongfu in front of the Ge Feng Tai Platform. (by Zhao Longwei)

2. A martial arts performance at Dapeng Market. (by Liu Xin)

3. A peddler selling wooden swords and spears in a Yunlong Hill temple fair during the third month of the lunar calendar. (by Wang Guiye)



Tourist Map of Xuzhou

Han Dynasty Tomb at Mt Beidongshan

Add: Beidongshan Village, Northwestern Suburb, Xuzhou City

Tel: (561) 8728 6064

Admission: 8 yuan **Opening hours:** 10:00 ~ 16:00

Transport: Take Bus 7, alight at Mengjiagou and then walk 600 metres on foot; travellers can also take a taxi for 50 yuan or so (round trip). Although this tomb is not easy to reach, the scenery makes it worthwhile visiting.

Peixian, Thousand Year Land of Dragons

As the homeland of Liu Bang, Emperor Gaozu of the Han Dynasty, Peixian has been known as the Thousand Year Land of Dragons and the Land of Emperors and Important Ministers. The Peixian Han Dynasty Castle is located at the heart of the town. Covering 66 hectares, it is composed of several large structures built in Han Dynasty style including Hancheng Park, the original temple of Emperor Gaozu, and the Elegy of Strong Wind Platform.

Add: No. 1, Hancheng Southern Road, Peixian, Xuzhou City

Tel: (561) 8463 8811 **Admission:** 25 yuan

Transport: Buses from the city bus terminal depart every 20 minutes between 06:00 ~ 19:00 and cost 13 yuan. The trip takes one hour.

Recommended Itineraries:

Day 1: Take the bus to the Mausoleum of King Chu at Shizi Hill, and then travel 400 metres west to the Museum of Terracotta Warriors and Horses. In the afternoon, visit the Xuzhou Arts Museum of Han Stone Sculptures, the Xuzhou Museum and the Xima Tai.

Day 2: Take the bus to the Han tomb at Guishan Hill in the morning; in the afternoon, visitors can go to the Yunlong Hill and the Yunlong Lake to enjoy the natural scenery.

Day 3: Travel to Peixian in the morning, and then change to another transport line to the mausoleum of Liu Bang.

Day 4: Tour the Han tomb at Beidong Hill in the morning, and then return to the urban area for sightseeing, shopping or relaxation.

Day 5: Travel to Lingbi County in Anhui Province. Change to a regular bus at the county seat to visit the tomb of Yu Ji, then return to the Lingbi County seat and change to a bus to Guzhen County for the night.

Day 6: Take a bus to Haocheng Town in the morning to visit the ancient battlefield in Gaixia, then return to the county seat and take a coach to Bangfu to change for Nanjing or Xuzhou. From Nanjing or Xuzhou fly to Hong Kong.

Hangzhou

Photos & Article • Dr. Engelbert Altenburger

a visit with Chinese Poetess Li Qingzhao and Italian traveller Marco Polo

When I arrived the first time in Hangzhou in 1978 as a curious foreign tourist from Germany, China had just opened her doors for foreign tourism. Thus the city appeared as mousy as all the abased cities of the country. Yet I could feel that Hangzhou, located at the beginning of the Grand Canal between the famous West Lake and Qiantangjiang River, emanated some special brilliance. Much of this feeling was related to a talented Chinese poetess and Italian traveller...

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In 1127 Hangzhou was the imperial capital of southern China, where the Song government had fled. As a provincial administrative staff, Li Qingzhao(1084 — 1155), too, had migrated with her husband from Jinan in Shandong to the busy trading place on the Qiantangjiang River.

Fate of Li Qingzhao in Hangzhou

The fate of Li Qingzhao, a famous talented Chinese poetess, was related with the rise and decline of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127—1279) and the "golden age" of the 12th century Hangzhou. Li Qingzhao was born in Jinan (capital city of Northeast China's Shandong Province) in the year 1081, when China's first public schools had just opened and grand scientific publications were issued. The lady of noble origin was married to a high-ranking provincial governor, with whom she not only shared common interests in archeology and poetry, but also issued the noteworthy epigraphic book "Catalogue of bronze and stone insprVpiptions" *(Jinshi Lu)*.

Once settled down in Hangzhou she not only had lost irreplaceable archeological publications and collections, but also her husband. The worst tragedy, however, was that she had to share personally the moral decline of the southern Song government, making her a co-martyr with Yue Fei (1104—1141). As she was a lady and a living critic of the obviously unpatriotic government, she did not enjoy a soon rehabilitation under the later Song Emperor Xiaozong. She rather had to suffer from slanders and insults from local administration, dominating male poet colleagues, and the society. Yet on the other hand, it was in Hangzhou that Li Qingzhao had emerged as China's vanguard feminist. She had reacted in due time against Neo-Confucianism enslavement of women, whose feet were bound and whose basic human rights disrespected. For her criticism she was mocked as a frivolous women, who no longer could enjoy the wealth and splendour of China's then capital. Instead she had to lead a poor and lonesome live, and when she has passed away, probably in 1155, the Jurchen (Nüzhen) shortly afterwards were to run over the Yangtze River and conquer southern China.

What Li Qingzhao could not show us in Hangzhou was more than complemented by the later illustrious traveller Marco Polo (1254—1324). After having arrived in the capital Khan Balyk (today's Beijing) in 1279 he served for 17 years as a high-ranking mandarin at the court of the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan (1215—1294). Amongst his numerous official travels he showed his greatest favour for Hangzhou, which he later, in Genoese captivity, was to describe in his legendary book "Messer Millione".

The times when Italian traveller Marco Polo had arrived in Hangzhou as a privileged foreigner and imperial traveller, the city was laid in ashes, devastated and destroyed by the new Mongolian rulers. And yet he was still impressed by the beauty of Hangzhou's scenery.

Hangzhou in the Eye of Marco Polo

He wrote down the words he caught from hearsay in an eternal work: the stories of Messer Millione ("Mister Million-times Swagger"), transferring to Europe an imaginative vision on "China's most splendid city".

Europe for the first time had learnt about Hangzhou as "the most splendid city in the world", flamboyant with golden palace halls rising above the southeastern corner of the West Lake. These were stretching on Phoenix-Hill (Fenghuang Shan) in midst of beautiful gardens dotted with lakes, fruit trees and flocks of rare animals. On the opposite northern lakeshore, where two hills frame the lake, Marco Polo mentions the residential quarters of Hangzhou's noble people and wealthy businessmen. Although by 20th tcentury this privileged city district between the temple of Yue Fei and the provincial governmental houses of Zhejiang has become degraded, it is destined to regain its historic status. A most worthwhile walk leading up to the early Song Baochu (Gem) Pagoda, will give immediate proof.

The city of Hangzhou described by Mr. Polo gives a picture on the new urban life of the Song Dynasty. Townspeople profited from the general economic prosperity. They belonged to a new class of citizens that replaced the old aristocratic society. China namely had entered the age of mercantilism as early as the 10th century, which in Europe followed only 400 years later. Driven by the overproduction of rice in the Yangtze delta trade had become the key economic activity, enhancing the development of a modern financial economy and a striking economic growth.

Impression of Today's Hangzhou

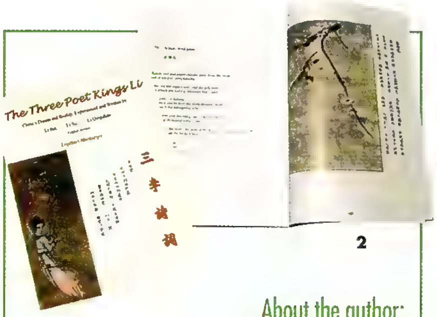
Today I would not be able to set my foot anymore on the city's soil at the old central railway station that resembled more a medieval palace than a passengers' train station to me, since it has been dismantled, and giving way to a modern station building. Yet today most foreign visitors would arrive anyway from Hangzhou's international airport. Arriving by the airport bus from there, Hangzhou and her modern stylized suburbs offer a surprising and unexpected glamour, giving plenty space for the correction of one's own imagination. The legendary historic city has risen from her ashes like a phoenix, polished up like hardly any other one.

1. Overlooking Qiantangjiang River.

2. English version *The Three Poet Kings Li* written by the author, published in 2000.

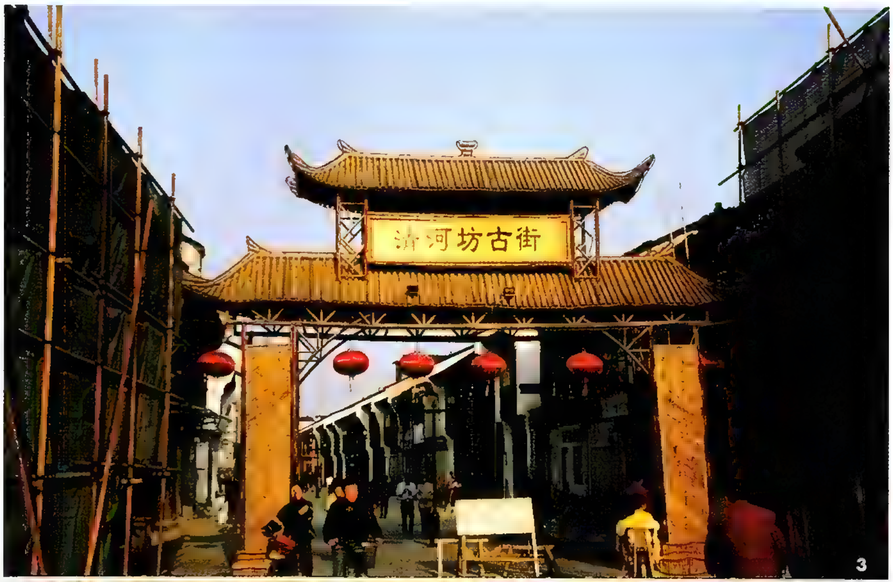
3. The Qinghefang Ancient Street marks a section of Hangzhou's remaining old town, which after 2000 was restored in its traditional architectural style.

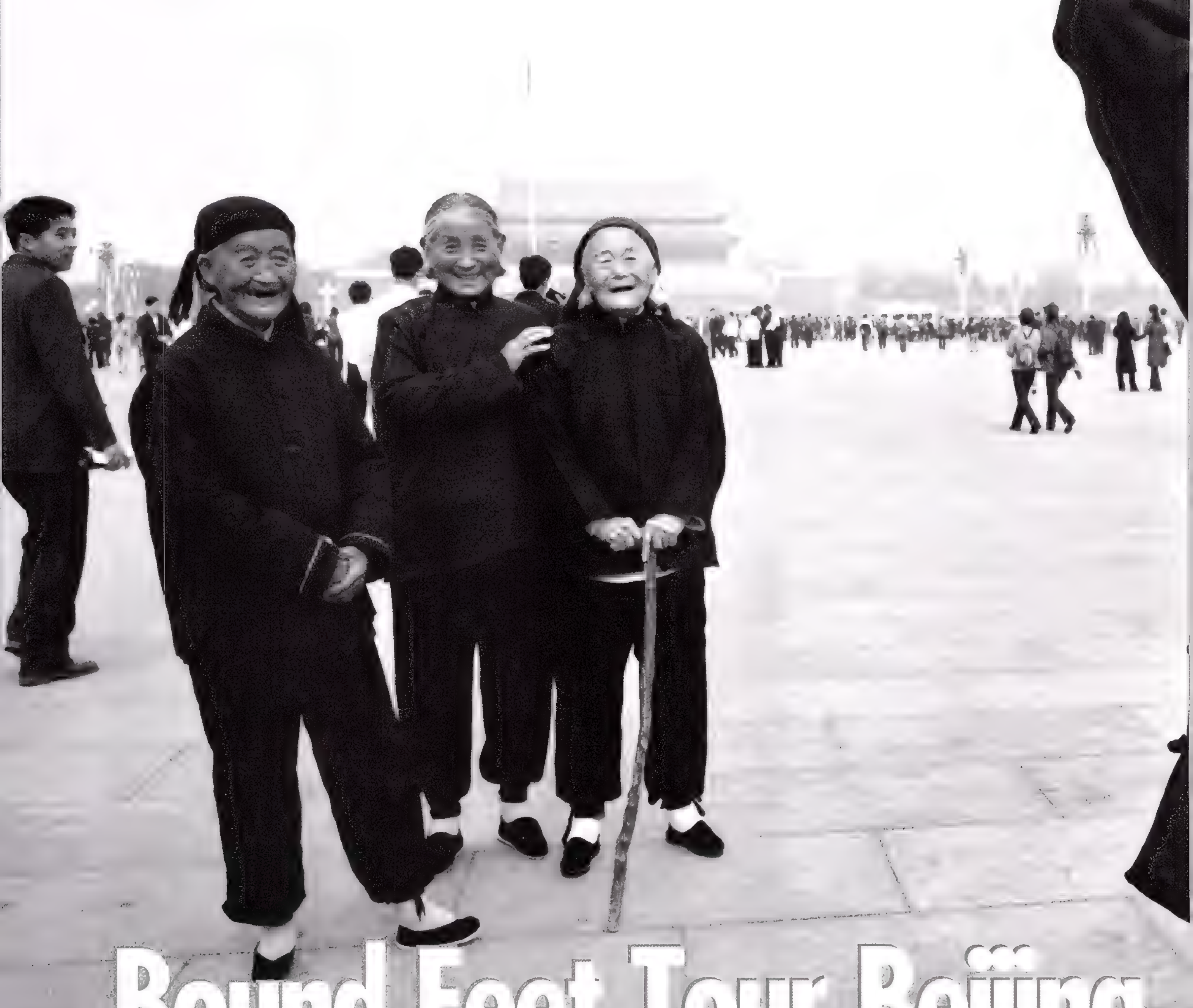
4. Hangzhou is now a tourist-friendly city in Zhejiang Province.



About the author:

Dr. Engelbert Altenburger is the writer of ***The Three Poet Kings Li*** (English version 2000, German version 1999) and a few other publications. The book gives a reader-friendly historic and geographic description of the Tang and Song dynasties in ancient China and three genius of Chinese language and literature. A selection of 10 poems from each poet are translated into English or German plus a colour painting created by the author's wife for each of the 30 poems. The author has travelled through China since 1978, and is now teaching at I-Shou University in Taiwan.





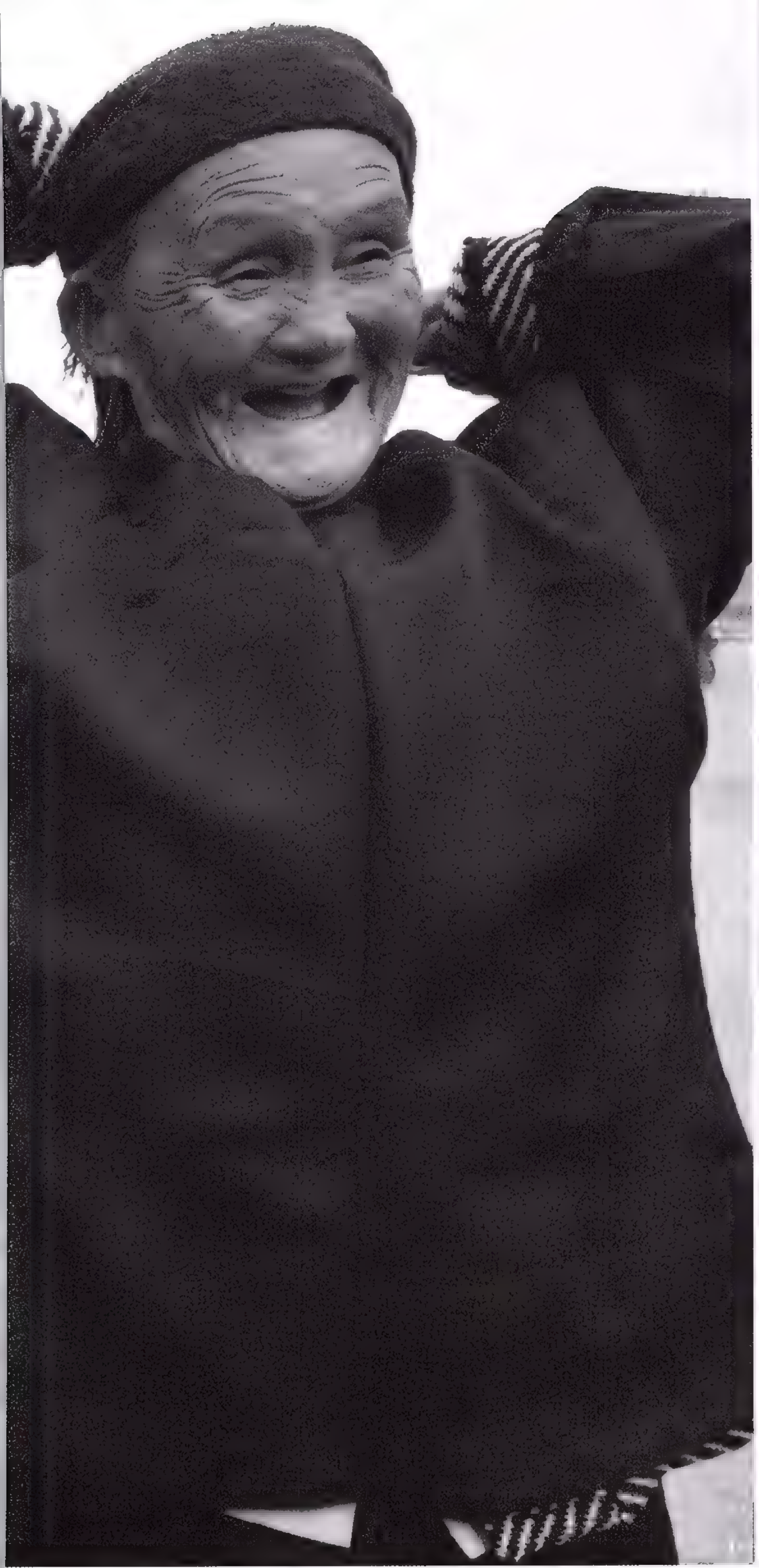
Bound Feet Tour Beijing

Photos & Article • Li Nan

Travellers from all over the world come to Beijing for its ancient sights and modern wonders, but perhaps never has Beijing welcomed a tourist group as unusual as a recent group of women travellers — who have never travelled further than the village market of their hometown and each have a pair of tiny bound feet, a relic of China's past now rarely discussed.

The women enjoyed their stay in Beijing, but behind their laughter and smiles lay strand upon strand of melancholy memories.

The group of bound feet women hailed from a retirement home in Baoji County in Binzhou, Northeast's China's Shandong Province. Not only were they delighted to be travelling outside their hometown, they were overjoyed to find out they were travelling to Beijing. Before departure the women



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1. The women with bound feet arrive joyously at Tian'anmen Square.

2. The women excitedly prepare for their journey to Beijing.

3. Foreign tourists grab the chance to take home a memory of the old women.

4. No matter where they went, the women were always the centre of attention (Mausoleum of Chairman Mao at rear).

fussed over their clothing and appearance, spending hours in front of the mirror and picking out their prettiest "Three-Inch Golden Lotus" shoes. As smiles lit up the old ladies' faces, time appeared to stand still and the old women seemed transported back to a happier time. After all, how many more times would such a chance present itself?

On departure day the women arose excitedly like children. One of them, 85-year-old Zheng Qi'e, put on a new jacket and shoes she had made herself and then began doing her hair in the mirror. Zheng was married when she was just 16 years old and had lived by her husband's side until his death many years ago. Today was the first time she had dressed up in tens of years.

Bound Feet: The Mark of a Good Wife

The first stop for the women in Beijing was the Chairman Mao Mausoleum. Despite the chill in the Beijing air, the women eagerly joined the queue in front of the mausoleum. Entering the hall, the women silently murmured at the imposing statue of Chairman Mao before spilling out into Tian'anmen Square. "I've only ever seen Tian'anmen in pictures", said 73-year-old Bai Shourong pointing at the Tian'anmen Gate. "But today, I've seen it with my own eyes!" The

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women excitedly gathered around for a group photo: "Just wait till the folks back home see this!"

Bai Shourong journeyed to Beijing with her husband Wang Zhenxing. Wang had been educated in a private academy, leaving him firmly steeped in conservative and traditional values. In their home, Bai was never allowed to speak her mind, and Wang decided all matters in their lives. Wang talked about their marriage, "Before deciding on marriage with her, I first looked at her feet. They were rather good, not too big. In those days there was a saying: 'Feet are the markers of a good wife'."

Curious Travellers

Needless to say, the journey to Beijing squarely opened the eyes of the women. From the rush of modern office workers bustling through the square on their way to work to the leisurely pastimes of Beijing residents flying kites on Tian'anmen Square, everything was new and curious. Foreign tourists were fascinated by their bound feet and stopped for many a group photo while crowds of onlookers huddled behind the women as they ascended to the top of Tian'anmen Gate.

By the side of busy Chang'an Avenue, the women gaped with amazement before forming a line to walk over the Jinshui Bridge. Asked why they crossed the bridge with such grandeur, the old women laughed and said that since in former times only high-ranking ministers were permitted to cross the bridge they had decided they too should cross the bridge in a stately fashion!

Old Curiosities in the Palace

On the next day the old women arose early; even though three hours remained till the opening of the Forbidden City, none could sleep a second longer.

As the old women strolled to the centre of the palace complex, they quickly became the focus under spotlight. Just by coincidence, an overseas camera crew was shooting a documentary nearby. When the crew heard about this group of women with bound feet they quickly approached and started a new round of interviews. Reports who have After successfully interviewing them, the reporters were so satisfied that they made V-signs to show victory.

Shying away from the glare of attention, the women moved into a shady spot away from the stares of other tourists. Not far away, they came across a group of youngsters dressed up in the royal robes for fun. The "emperor's" leather shoes contrasted sharply with the royal "dragon robe" causing an amused twitter among the women. Two of the "palace maidens" spotted the old women laughing and struck up a conversation with them, intrigued. The old women in turn admired the "palace maiden" costumes and poured over them, thread by thread.

On Wangfujing Street

On the third day, the old women again rose early to catch the subway to a place they had long heard about — Wangfujing Street. Since this was their first experience on the subway, the women were at first hesitant to get on the train. Only when the second train came did the women dare to tread gingerly onto the train, tottering along in their small shoes. A group of young men stood up for the old women, and they continued to survey every detail of the train from their seated positions.

When the train arrived at the station, another obstacle awaited. As well as the groups' first experience of the subway, today was also the first time they had come across an escalator. The women were struck motionless in fear at getting on the escalator, causing a long delay for the people coming behind. However, finally the women conquered their fears and placed their tiny feet onto the moving steps.

On the shopping street, the women's gazes were drawn in every direction. When they saw something that caught their fancy, the women brought out their purses filled with money they had pocketed away over many years. He Fengying bought more than 10 silk scarves saying: "The retirement village director and staff are like my own children. Many of them couldn't come on this trip, so I want to take some presents back for them!"

After a few hours of shopping, the women stopped by the side of the road for a rest, drawing the smiles and curious gazes of many a passer-by. Rested, the women continued on to a group of statues. One of the statues depicted a small boy reaching down to dust off his shoes, the heel of the shoe standing almost as high as the boy himself. The women stopped to point and laugh at the massive shoe depicted in the statue. Zheng Qi'e placed her tiny foot into the massive shoe to compare them. Her tiny foot looked as small in the massive bronze shoe as a thumbtack looks miniature in the palm of one's hand.

First Time at McDonalds

Lunchtime soon came around and the women ambled over to McDonalds, crammed with lunchtime shoppers. This was the first time the women had visited a McDonalds and probably the first time McDonalds had been visited by bound feet. Within a few minutes the women had their order of burger, fries and Coke ready and sat down to eat this "first meal".

The women inspected their burgers with all the curiosity of a new discovery, almost as if doubting such a thing could be eaten. One by one, they chomped down, laughing at their own trepidation and soon the table was filled with the noise of slurping Cokes and crispy fries being eagerly consumed. After the table had been cleared, some of the women praised the taste, some were indifferent, and some said a hamburger just wasn't as good as good old plain white rice.

1. Understandably, walking in bound feet requires much rest.

2. The women crowd around the "emperor" and "palace maidens".

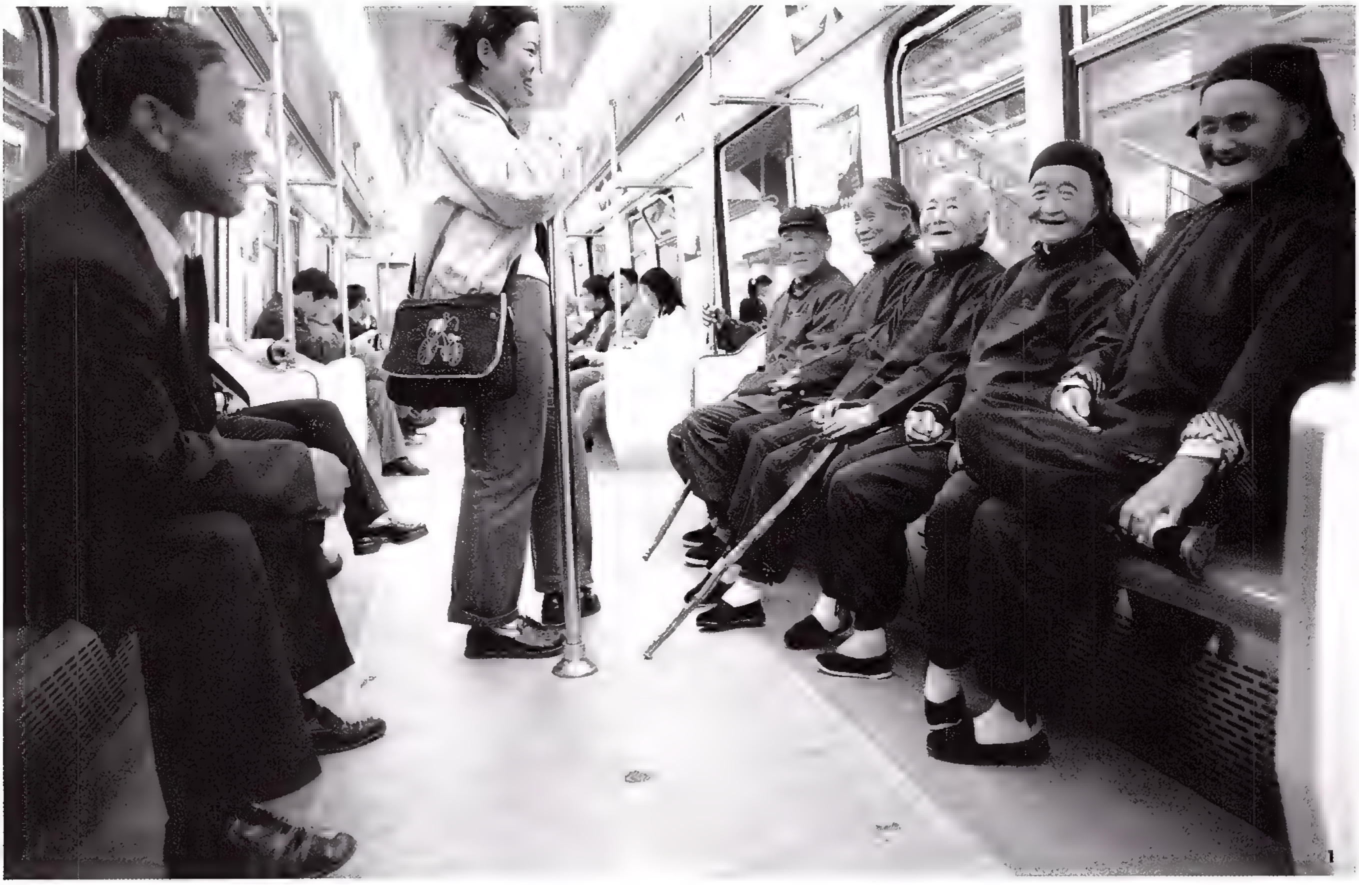
3. The women encounter an overseas camera crew in the Forbidden City and the crew documents these living treasures.

4. The old women make stunning contrasts with the modern city.

5. Never did the old women imagine they would one day enter the Forbidden City.

The whirlwind tour made lasting impression on the women. Said one as she got into the retirement village car to Shandong: "I never dreamed I would be able to come to Beijing. This time I've seen Chairman Mao, the Forbidden City, and much more; if I died today it would still have been worth it. In the past, only the emperor had people waiting on him as he toured the famous sights of the land. Haven't we been leading an emperor's life these past few days?"

Translated by Bret Sutcliffe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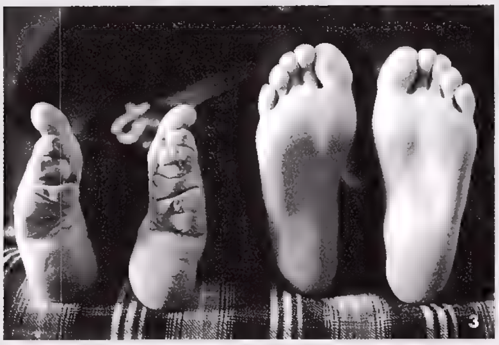
The Origins of "Three-Inch Golden Lotus"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Although bound feet were once beautified with the euphemism "Three-Inch Golden Lotus", in fact they were the result of a cruel and violent practice.

Bound feet first appeared in the Five Dynasties (907—960). Li Yu, emperor of the Southern Tang Dynasty, can be said to have been the first advocate of bound feet. Records note that dancing maidens Li's palace bound their feet into crescent moon shapes using cloth and wore silk stockings to dance on lotuses made from gold. Emperor Li Yu praised this performance piece as "images sent from the lofty clouds". Later this practice spread from the royal family into the general populace during the Northern Song Dynasty when bound feet become a sign of female beauty and propriety and normal feet were looked down upon. The wife of the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368—1644) Zhu Yuanzhang who rose from humble beginnings formed an object of mirth precisely because she had "large" unbound feet.

The practice of binding girl's feet began when the girl was between five and six years of age and used long strips of cloth to curl her four outer toes down towards the center of the sole to form the "three-inch golden lotus". Since such pain and suffering can be well imagined, the practice relied on a system of enforcement carried out by the elder generation. Ignoring cries and tears, mothers and grandmothers enforced feet binding in order to fulfill their responsibility and ensure the future marriage of their daughters.

Foot binding gained such wide acceptance because it created a specific idea of "feminine beauty" through the use of human manipulation. Prior to the Five Dynasties, there were already poems describing the beauty of small feet for women; after the Five Dynasties, small feet were euphemized with words such as "golden lotus", "perfume", and "lotus sprang forth from step to step". By the time of the Qing Dynasty, foot binding was so widespread that there were practically no women in the Han ethnicity who did not practice foot binding.

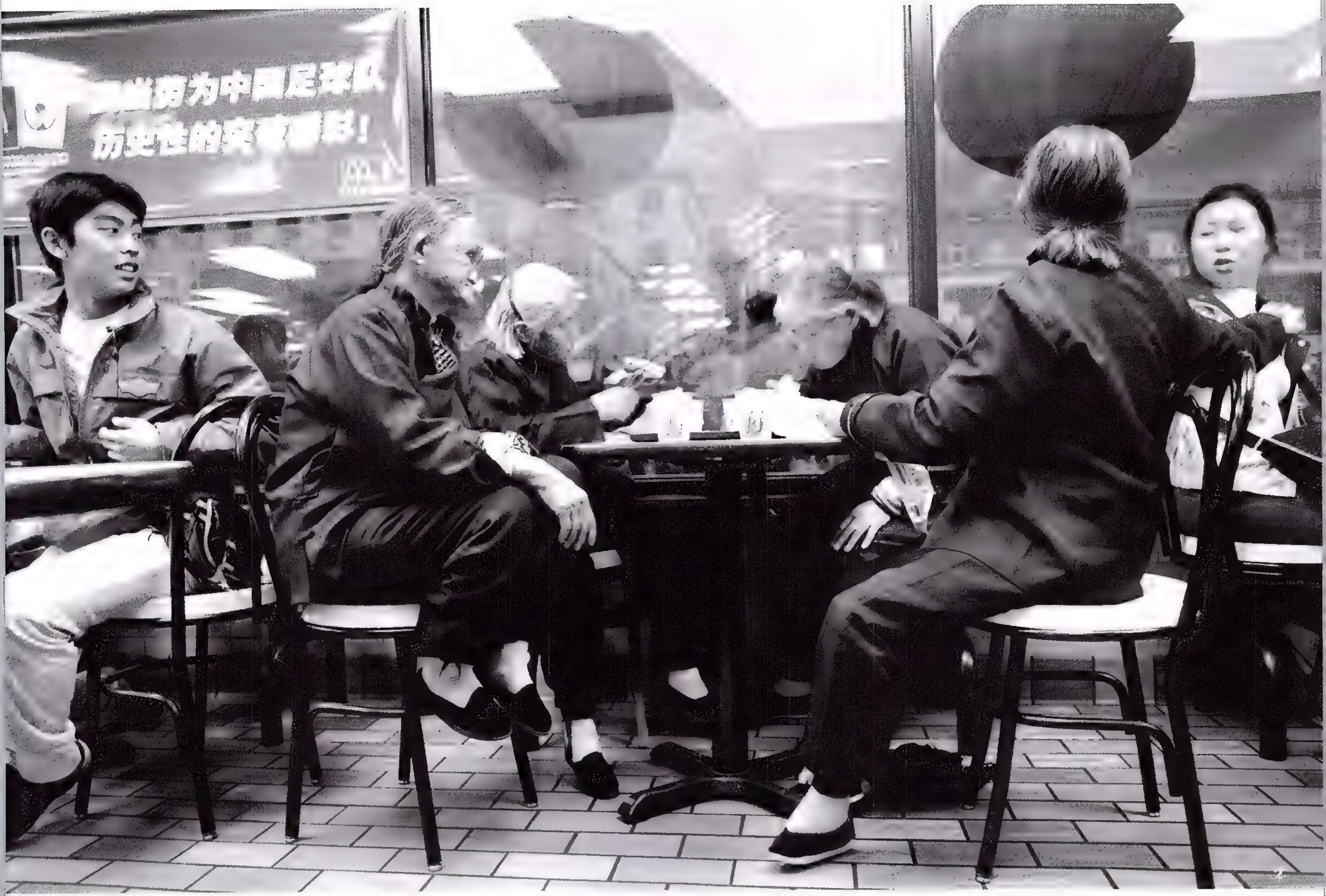
Many experts point out that foot binding also had an ulterior motive to limit the freedom of women to move about as they wish. In this way, foot binding in

1. After a lifetime of travel by horses, goats, and oxen, this was the first time they had travelled underground.

2. An exciting first meal at McDonalds.

3. A comparison between normal feet and a pair that has been subject to binding.

4. 82-year-old Zhang Zhaomei demonstrates foot binding.



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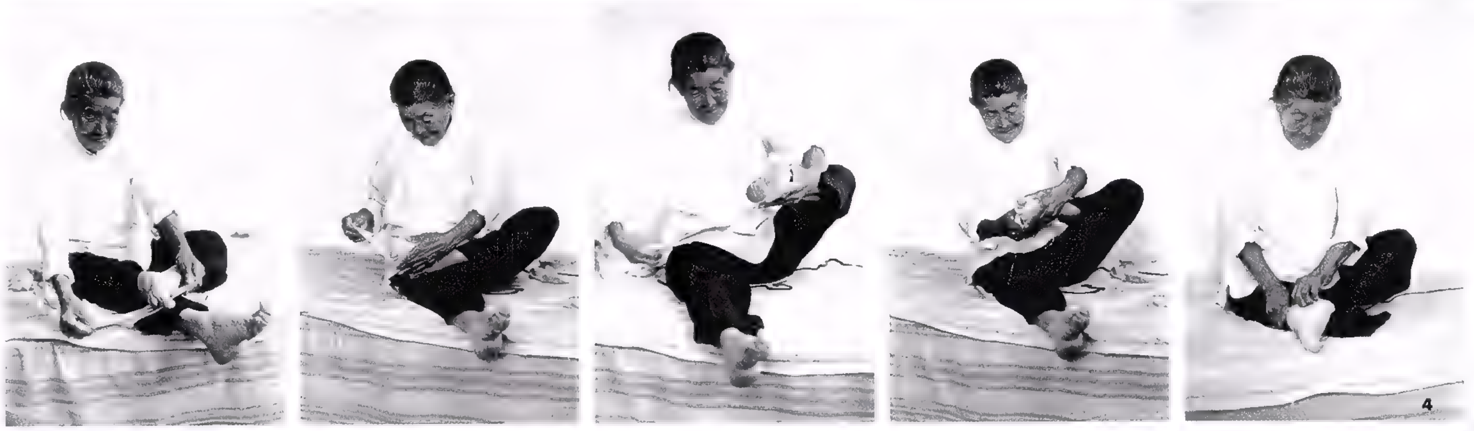

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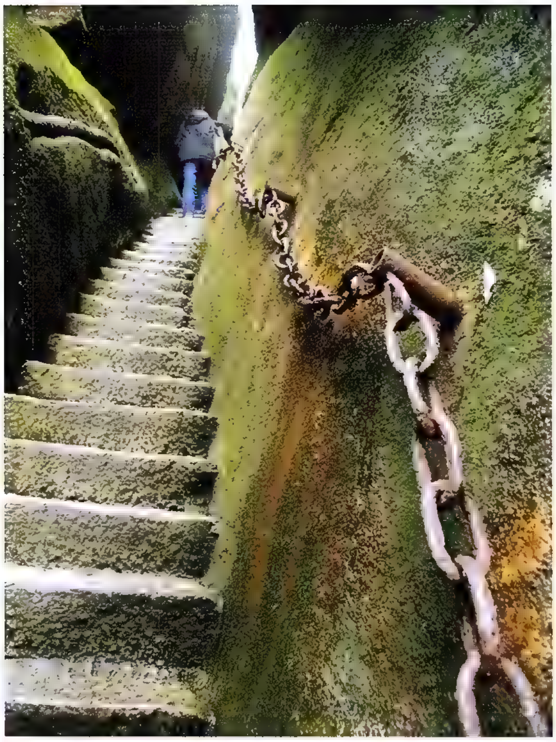
China can be compared to ancient Egyptian men forbidding women to wear shoes and to European men requiring women to wear chastity belts. The reality however was that apart from the small number of women in the upper classes, the great majority of women in ancient China also worked for a living. Women such as this spent their daily lives racked by a pain few modern women can now imagine.

As early as the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1644—1911), foot binding was outlawed by Emperor Kangxi and the brief Taiping Rebellion also proclaimed anti-foot binding laws. However it wasn't until the end of the Qing Dynasty that foot binding began to fade in popularity. Today it is rare to find examples of what the communists called 'liberated feet'. And as the elderly generation gradually passes away, the remaining examples of "three inch golden lotus" feet become fewer and fewer, relegating this thousand-year-old practice to the pages of the history books.

Three Visits to
Mt Sanqingshan

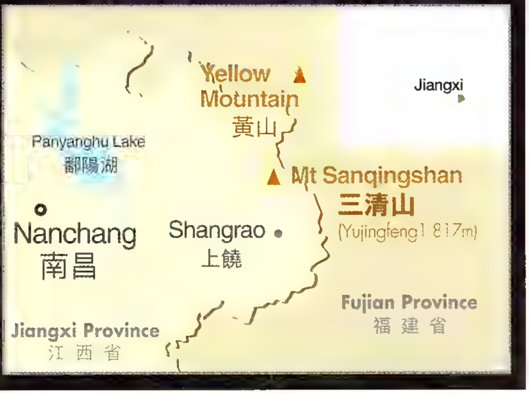
Photos & Article : Wang Congjie

The ethereal beauty of Mt Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) draws an endless stream of tourists like pious pilgrims. But Sanqingshan, just about 300 km away, with exotic pines, bizarre rocks and seas of cloud as stunning as those of its famous sibling, is more accessible and less expensive to visit. More importantly, not being overrun with people, the quiet surroundings completely immerse the visitor in nature.



1. Yutai (Jade Terrace) is one of the best places to capture the first rays of the sunrise and the sea of clouds surrounding the mountain.

2. The hundreds of stone steps of "Yixian Tian" (A Gleam of Sky) challenge the willpower and endurance of even the most die-hard hiker.

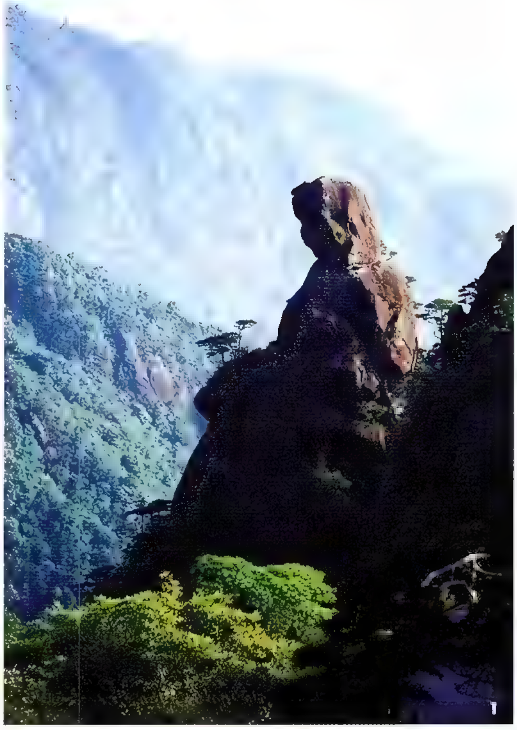


No mountain can compare with the "Five Sacred Mountains" (Mt Taishan of Shandong Province in the east, Mt Huashan of Shaanxi Province in the west, Mt Hengshan of Hunan Province in the south, Mt Hengshan of Shanxi Province in the north, and Mt Songshan of Henan Province in central China). So goes the famous Chinese saying, but I disagree. The Five Sacred Mountains cannot compare with Mt Huangshan, for it is superb. I have visited Huangshan several times and am always deeply impressed by its beauty. Nevertheless, an unfortunate event a few years ago shifted my focus to another mountain.

In the fall of 2001, I went to Huangshan on a photography jaunt. Afterwards, when I collected my luggage at the airport, I was shocked to find that 60 rolls of undeveloped film had been stolen. This "tragedy" depressed me for a couple of days. At the time, a good friend tried to comfort me, saying, "Does Huangshan matter that much? I can take you to Sanqingshan in a few days,"as if it were a suitable substitute. Could there be another mountain in the world as beautiful as Huangshan? I went along with him, deep in doubt. Then I saw Sanqingshan; my affection for it has continued to grow ever since.

A Quick Trip from Shenzhen to Sanqingshan

I have been to Sanqingshan (Three Clear Mountains) three times now. I can appreciate its similarities to Huangshan as well as its unique features and enjoy the distinctive scenery of each season. The mountain delights and surprises me with every visit. Best of all, Sanqingshan, located in Jiangxi Province, is a day's drive from Shenzhen, so it is not too far from



Hong Kong. Sanqingshan and Wuyuan County (acclaimed as "the most beautiful village in China") fall within the Shangrao District (a recently developed tourist area) of Jiangxi Province, so tourists can visit both in a single trip.

In fact, long a famous Taoist site, Sanqingshan is known as the sister mountain of Huangshan for its similar landscape and scenic features.

First Visit: A Tranquil Winter World

Snow fell during my first trip to Sanqingshan, but I knew from experience that the weather conditions would probably be fine for taking photos. Since winter is the low season for tourism, I could not find a porter and had to carry my bulky luggage and equipment up to the snowy peak by myself. But I only had to walk half the height of the mountain as a five-kilometre ropeway transported visitors to the mid-point. It took my friend and I an hour to reach Yutai (Jade Terrace) walking up the stone steps. We checked into the Yutai Hotel: a one-night stay, including three meals (simple dishes only), was just 100 yuan. With good views of the sunrise and sunset just a few minutes' walk away, the hotel is popular with photographers.

Snow naturally melts faster on the more southern Sanqingshan than it does on Huangshan. Nevertheless, the two mountains are only about 300 km apart. Every winter Huangshan is packed with tourists crowding in to glimpse the snowy scenery, and the air crackles continuously with the racket of tourist guides' loudspeakers. Hotel rooms are extremely pricey and often full. In contrast, the little Huangshan of Sanqingshan is still unspoilt. Visitors are few and sometimes all you can hear in the quiet surroundings is your own heart beating. You could howl to the moon as loudly as you dared, the echoes coming back to you from the valley floor with no other voice in answer. Hotel rooms are 50 per cent cheaper than those at Huangshan too, with meals about 25 per cent less dear.

Winter at Sanqingshan fascinated me. The rime of the early morning mist is particularly elegant and the sun emerges from layer upon layer of cloud. The pines, rocks and fog are ever-changing. Mesmerized, I suddenly had an idea. Why not buy a little hut here and become a hermit? My friend chided me. "Come on, you old romantic! This is a 4-A tourist area. Do you really think they'd let you live here?"

Sanqingshan is covered in towering trees but I was most impressed by the few strong ancient pines. Wreathed in filmy clouds, they seem almost

1. Sanqingshan's "Spring Goddess" statue resembles a modern woman, perhaps even a diva.

2. The imposing "Python Leaving the Mountain". Two years ago, the internationally acclaimed French "Spiderman" Alain Robert attempted to scale it without any climbing equipment but failed.

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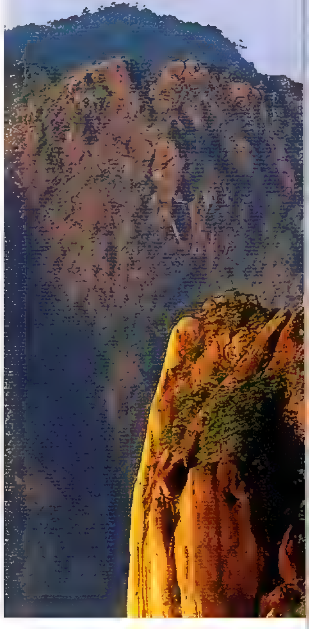

3. In addition to the spectacular views it provides, the hanging coastal pathway is a magnificent engineering achievement. Some physical endurance is required to complete the 25-km circuit.

4. The scenery at "San Pai Jian" is worth the effort it takes to get there.

animated, or like lively abstract sculptures conveying an inspiring message.

Second Visit: Summer Sojourn

Happiness is contagious. Seeing the photos I'd taken, my relatives and friends urged me to visit the mountain again and take them along. So during the kids' long summer break, seven of us "marched" up the mountain.

The snows of winter had long gone, replaced by rain. The drizzle carried on for two days but my mood was not dampened. We hiked enthusiastically to the highest peak, Yu Jing Feng (1,817 metres above sea level). Although scenery was obscured by mist, we rejoiced at "conquering" the loftiest heights of Sanqingshan.

Then early on the morning of the third day, the missing sun peeked through a crack in the rolling clouds. With the mist sweeping over the emerald mountain ranges, it was as if a Chinese painting

began moving before our eyes. Though any photographer would be thrilled to capture such a moment, the scene will be forever etched on your mind, with or without a camera. Stand atop the mountain, amidst the solitary old pines and otherworldly rock formations, and let a wisp of fog envelop you briefly before it drifts away again without a trace.

I don't intend to pit Sanqingshan and Huanghsan against each other. As sister mountains, they are similar in their natural attributes. As for differences, Huangshan has a hot spring while Sanqingshan has a thousand-year-old Taoist temple and a hanging path to offer. But while both mountains are captivating, I prefer quiet Sanqingshan to overcrowded Huangshan.

Third Visit: A Walk in the Clouds

For my third trip to Sanqingshan, the Creator gave me spring mist. Let us treat it as serendipity. The mountain's west coastal scenic area, developed only recently, is a four-kilometre hanging trail of concrete at sea level 1,600 metres. From this amazing structure my friends and I gazed down into the deep valley 200 metres below us. Hiking along the trail in the mist made us feel as if we were walking on clouds.

There are many extraordinary rock formations along the walkway, but I was entranced by the mighty pines. These weirdly twisted trees poke out through spaces in the concrete, extending their limbs every which way. To preserve them, the construction crew made every effort to accommodate the trees. Visitors will appreciate the respect shown for the area's flora.

At the end of the trail, we turned onto a narrow path. As the woods became denser and the mist grew thicker, it seemed we were melting into the air. Then the thousand-year-old Taoist temple, Sanqing Palace, came into view.

Sanqingong has stood on the mountain for 1,600

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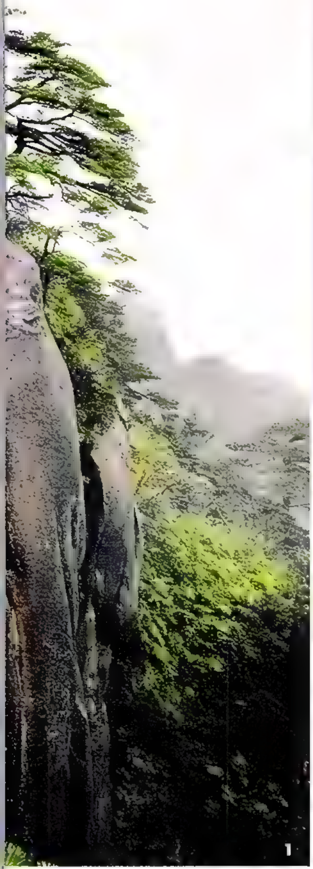
years, its history evident in its stone incense stand and sculptures. Long ago, Ge Hong meditated and practised alchemy here. Constructed according to the Taoist Eight Trigrams philosophy, the temple perfectly illustrates the concept of human integration with nature. Unfortunately, the wrecked main hall is all that remains following a fire three years ago. The sight of the badly damaged walls of the east and west side halls saddened me.

Translated by Ezekiel Pang



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1. After a rain, clouds and mist float across the mountain range, creating a moving Chinese painting.

2-5. The extraordinary pines of Sanqingshan resemble a dragon, a running horse, abstract sculpture, calligraphic text. Solitary green pines or old iron pines seem to transmit the power of life and offer inspiration.

Tips for Touring Sanqingshan:

Admission: 100 yuan

Ropeway Fee: Single Journey: 60 yuan; Round Journey: 100 yuan (Single Journey: 40 mins)

Long-distant transportation:

Take a flight to Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province, then get to Shangrao by bus and change for another bus to Sanqingshan. Or you can go to Quzhou, Zhejiang Province, then have a bus ride directly to Sanqingshan.

Best tour seasons:

All seasons. In spring (Mar ~ Apr) and autumn (Sep ~ Oct), it would be more likely for you to see a sea of clouds and flowing mist; In June, you can see azaleas all over the mountain; Summer (July ~ Aug) is a raining season. After a rain, you may see a rainbow, Buddhist light, or a sea of cloud; in winter, besides snowy scenes, you can also see crystal-like rime.

Mountaineering routes:

Day 1: Go up the mountain by ropeway. Stay at the Tianmen Hotel or other inns nearby. Put down your luggage and travel round the west coast, Sanqinggong Taoist temple, Yu Jing Feng Peak (it takes about 5 ~ 6 hours). Stay overnight in Tianmen Hotel or other inns.

Day 2: After breakfast, get all your luggage (or part of it)go to Yutai via "Yixian Tian". Check in at Yutai Mansion and then go sighting in Nanqing Garden, enjoy the sunset at Yutai and stay overnight in Yutai Hotel (or Dujian Mansion nearby).

Day 3: See the sunrise at Yutai (Jade Terrace) early in the morning. Take your luggage after breakfast and leave the mountain by ropeway. If you are so energetic, you can go down the mountain by walking and enjoy the scenery along the way.

Accommodation:

Tianmen Mansion (3 stars)

Standard room: 260 ~ 320 yuan

Only 5-minute distance from the mid levels. It is convenient to get to the scenic spots to the West Coast, Nanqing Garden and Yu Jing Feng Peak, etc. But for seeing the sunrise and the sunset, you have to spend an hour and take the stone steps to the top.

Yutai Shanzhuang

Rate: 60 yuan/ person

Nanqing Garen is situated at the high point of Yutai. It is a better place to take position for shooting the sunrise and the sunset. But for accommodation, you can only have inns. The facilities are simple without bathroom and only public toilets are available. It can only accommodate groups not exceeding 20 persons.

Local specialties:

Wood ears fungus, rock tripe, wild vegetables, dried bamboo shoot, mountain mushroom, Gold Tea (a wild plant of Sanqingshan which can cure flu and lower blood pressure).

Chinese porcelain is renowned the world over but the most famous pieces hail from the pottery town of Jingdezhen. Jingdezhen rose to prominence in the Northern Song Dynasty during the reign of the Zhenzong emperor. Imperial patronage ensured the world knew about Jingdezhen, but more important than emperors' favours is the work of humble workers and artisans who have passed on the porcelain craft for centuries.

Famous Across the World—

Jingdezhen Porcelain

Photos · Wang Min, Feng Jin Article · Wang Min

My journey into Jingdezhen ceramic art began at the Porcelain History Museum in Fengshu Shan (Maple Tree Mountain).

More than a collection of display rooms, the Porcelain History Museum is located on the very site of an ancient kiln that has been producing porcelain since the Han dynasty. Jingdezhen porcelain first came to prominence in the North and South dynasties (420—581) and rapid development in the Tang Dynasty (618—907) brought technology that produced vivid colour like jade. By this time, Jingdezhen porcelain had ascended from utensil to an object of art.

Jingdezhen wasn't always so famous, nor even was it always called the same name. Long a fan of porcelain produced in the Jingdezhen area, the Song dynasty emperor sent craftsmen to the town (then called Changnan) in 1004 to produce porcelain for his own private use. Since the name of the emperor's reign in that year was Jingde, "Jingde" was sealed onto the base of each piece destined for the royal palace. Ever since, Changnan has been named "Jingdezhen" ("town of Jingde").

In the Yuan Dynasty (1271—1368), the techniques and artistry of porcelain making continued to be refined and by the Ming (1368—1644) and Qing (1644—1911) dynasties Jingdezhen had become the national centre of porcelain production.

For the sheer variety of wares produced, the town became known as "the centre for all porcelain under heaven".

In the hills surrounding the museum lie the remains of many royal kilns. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, officials were sent from Beijing to supervise the production of porcelain for the royal collection. To this day, the shattered remnants of products from such royal kilns still lie buried around the town. One estimate has it that these remnants would make over 2,000 Ming Dynasty "Que Ji" pieces if glued back together.

But to understand how a small village could develop into the porcelain capital of the world, we must pay a visit to the ancient villages of Gaoling and Yaoli.

I rent a hire car to climb the twisting road to Gaoling and at the top of the hill walk along the ancient ridge for an hour before coming across the remains of quarries used in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Despite their small size, the tour guide told us these remains have landmark status in the history of porcelain in Jingdezhen, not to mention the world. During the North and South dynasties (420—581) Gaoling clay (aluminum silica acid alkaline soil) significantly transformed the quality of porcelain made in Jingdezhen. Prior to the discovery at Gaoling, porcelain could only be fired up to 1,150 degrees and would often lose shape after removal from the kiln. Gaoling clay, on the other hand, could be fired to 1,330 degrees and displayed a low rate of degradation after firing. Moreover, Gaoling clay was easy to mine and clean, and amenable to forming by craftstman. In retrospect, it is no exaggeration to say that the discovery at Gaoling was a revolutionary breakthrough in porcelain history.

In 1712 a French missionary introduced the Gaoling porcelain technique to makers in France and by the middle of the 18th century Jingdezhen-quality porcelain was being produced in France. The technique soon spread to England, Sweden and Holland spurring the revitalization of the entire European porcelain industry. The impact of

1. Jingdezhen porcelain is fired in the kiln. (by Wang Min)

2. Disregarded clay is turned into artwork by means of an artist's inspiration. (by Feng Jin)

3. A craftswoman applies paint to a sculpted ceramic piece. (by Feng Jin)

1. Even the lampposts are made from porcelain! (by Feng Jin)

2. Exquisite porcelain crystallizes the hard work and brilliance of the Jingdezhen craftsman. (by Wang Min)

3. Bustling ceramics markets can be found all over Jingdezhen. (by Feng Jin)

Jingdezhen technique and artistry on world porcelain history is immeasurable. Even today, the internationally recognised word for the raw material used to produce is Gaoling.

Leaving Gaoling and returning to the mountain foot, I wander along the old riverside path to arrive at an important juncture in the transportation of Gaoling clay: the Dongfu wharf. After cleansing, the Gaoling clay would be compacted into blocks and transported from here downstream to the kilns in Jingdezhen. Not far away, among picturesque farmlands and hills in Yaoli village, lies another excavation site for minerals, one of the ingredients for Jingdezhen porcelain. Continuing on to a hill next to a gushing stream lie the remains of over 30 chimney stacks, water wheels and washing basins, not to mention the odd porcelain shard to be found in the underbrush. These remnants speak volumes on the size and scale of the industry that once stood here.

Back in the town, I discovered Fanjia Jing Market completely by accident. I started off wandering down to the porcelain market near the city square when I noticed off to the side an open space buzzing with people trading in all sorts of porcelain and ceramic pieces. I quickly found out from one of the vendors that this was a famous local market and manufacturing centre. As I walked into the market, a wave of busy market activity hit me. Along both sides of the narrow alley shops crammed together selling all manner of ceramic ware. Customers fussed over their purchases; shopkeepers gathered together to chat, play a round of mahjong or start knitting a woolen sweater for their children. From time to time a cart would trundle by crammed with ceramic cups and pots followed by a labourer balancing clay on planks hanging from his shoulders. The local shopkeepers welcomed me into their stores where I took a few snaps. One shopkeeper, Mr. Gan, invited me into the workshop at the back of his store where he introduced the manufacturing process for the blue and white porcelain the area was known for. Towards evening, he lit the kiln and placed a rack of blue and white porcelain in for firing. Ten hours later, the dull and grey pieces were transformed into shiny and alluring blue and white Jingdezhen porcelain.

Translated by Bret Sutcliffe

Travel Tips

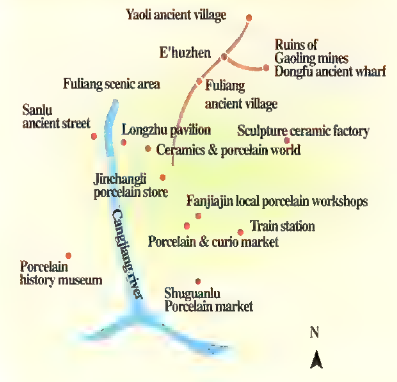
Transport: Jingdezhen is well-serviced by major highways, train lines and air routes.

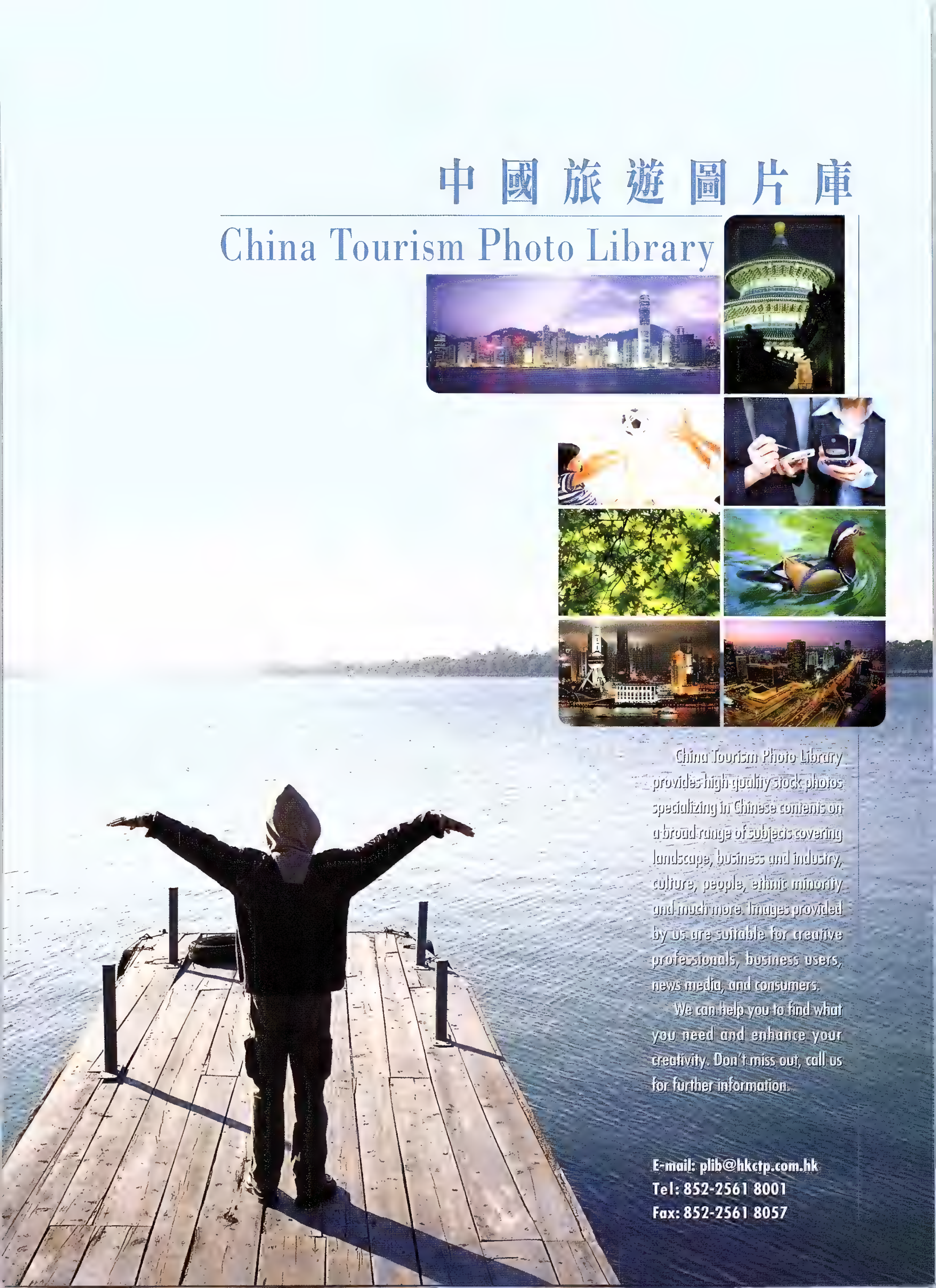
Accommodation: Jingdezhen has many two and three star hotels. Average cost is around 50 yuan per person.

Food: Local dishes in Jingdezhen tend towards the salty and spicy.

Surrounding Sights: Apart from the Porcelain History Museum, Longzhu Pavilion, former site of the Gaoling mines, Dongfu wharf and Yaoli Ancient Village, other places worth visiting include Fuliang Ancient Village, Sanlu Ancient Street and the ancient wharf. The bustling ceramics market Fanjia Jing Market is located close to Guangchang Nanlu and is not to be missed. Here you will be able to experience the lives of local ceramic craftsmen close up.

Shopping: There are many porcelain shopping districts around the town. Porcelain can be bought from the Ceramics and Porcelain World on Lianshe Road North, Jinchangli Porcelain Building on Zhushan Road Central, local porcelain market on Shuguang Road and sightseeing places mentioned in the text. When buying porcelain be wary of fakes, fake authenticity statements and grand claims made about the maker's fame


Sights In and Around Jingdezhen



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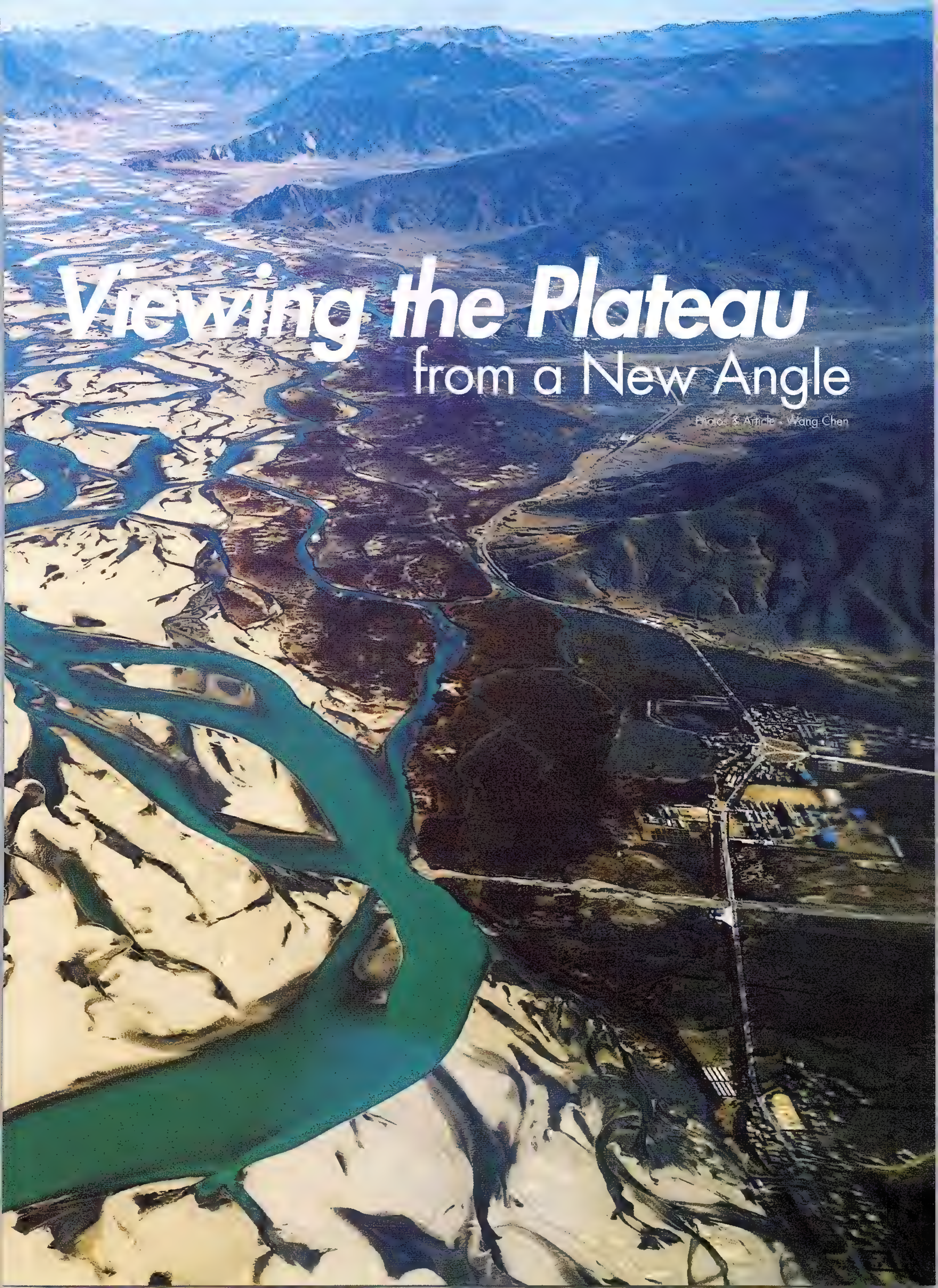
Viewing the Plateau from a New Angle

Photos & Article - Wang Chen



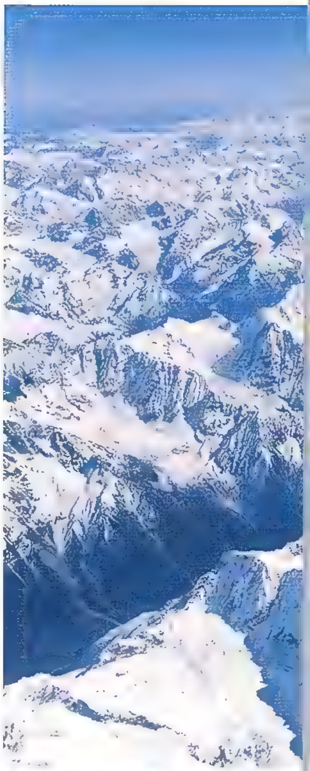
As a photography fan, I had long been dreaming of taking pictures from the air. When one has a bird-eye's view of the vast land, one would not just have a different angle for the panoramic view, but would have one's vision totally changed. Those scenes familiar to you become more sacred and mysterious, the unusual pictures of luxuriant and artistic landscapes unfold in front of you.

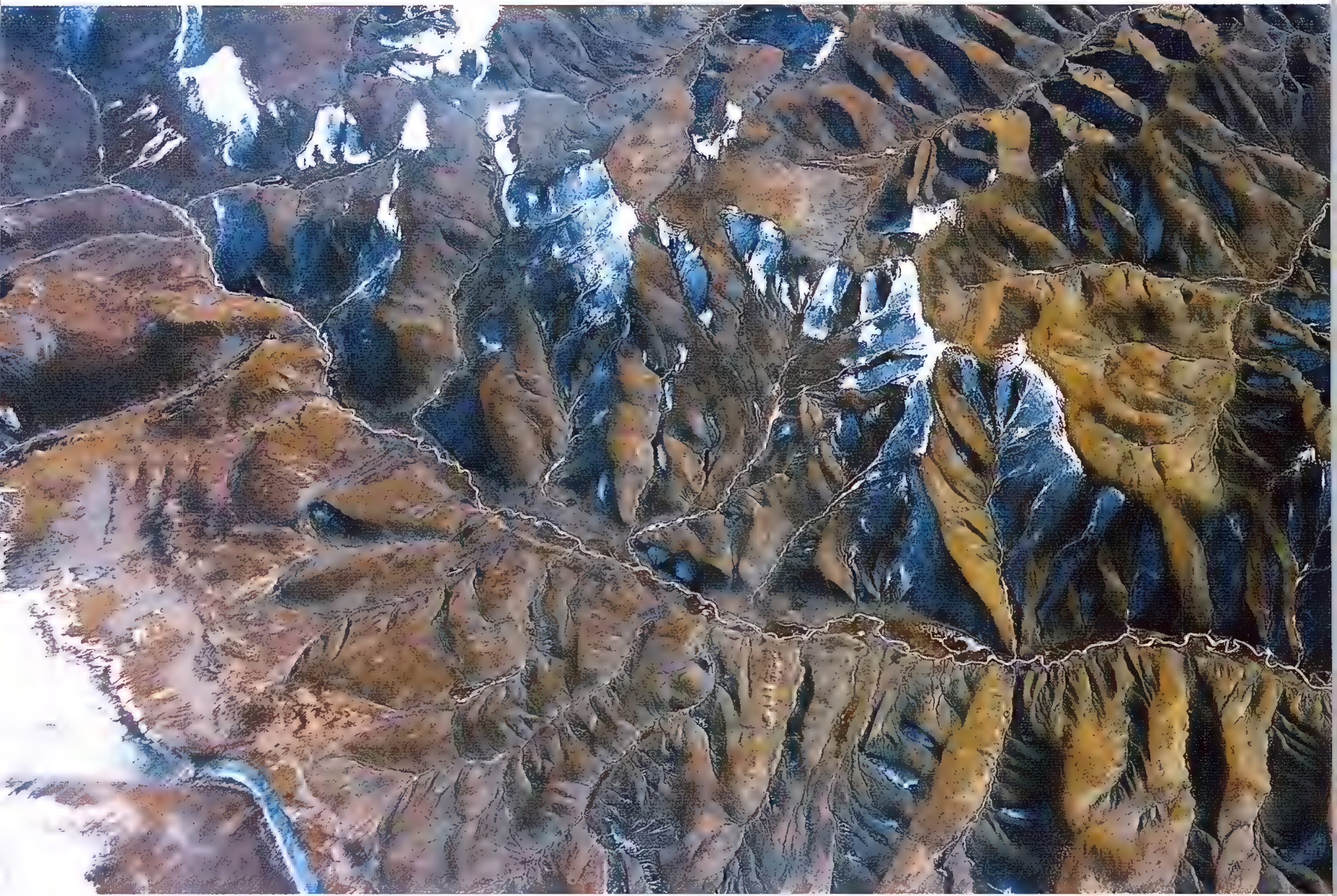
In the end of 2004, I had a trip of aerial photography together with several professional photographers. Our transport was a huge Russian freighter. Flying from Chengdu to Lhasa, we focused our lenses on the Himalayas glaciers and the Yarlung Zangbo River.

In Tibetan language, the word "himalayas" means "hometown for ice and snow". What we saw were numerous snow-capped peaks with luxuriant forests growing here and there and waters of blue, green or white colour running among them.

My teammates were all using Hasselblad cameras for taking square pictures. Mine was an X-pan, which is popularly used in landscape shooting, but not in aerial photography. I shot many boundless scenes with it and felt contented with my new experiences. When I found horizontal photos would not be able to best express the moving effect of aerial photography, I turned the camera back and forth to take pictures of various angles. As a result, the X-pan was given full play and I got wonderful new creative works!

Previously, I thought aerial photography was





Previous page: The spectacular Yarlung Zangbo River located south of Lhasa.

1. The Hengduan Mountain ranges.

2. Mountain ranges is the most important ecosystem in the world.

definitely for bird-eye's pictures only. Now I found when you looked forward from the plane, the scenes were even more breath-taking. I did not need to choose a special angle to take good pictures at all. All I did was pressing the shutter again and again, trying not to miss any chance.

I was over excited, though, as it was my first aerial photographic trip. Sometimes my hand trembled when I pressed the shutter, which ruined the photos. To avoid this to happen again in the later days, I worked out a plan every time before we set off. I would carefully observe the light and angle of the objects and the time of action to assure my success.

Keeping the Himalayan Glaciers

While my camera was recording the most beautiful scenes in the world, it also exposed some covert problems for human beings. In a recent report given by the World Nature Fund on the Himalayan glaciers, the retreat of the glaciers and the affection to Nepal, India and China, it is said that affected by the increasing warming up of the globe, the glaciers in this area retreat 10~15 metres every year. Though the problem has been widely recognized, it has not yet drawn enough attention. WNF warns that the Himalayan glaciers are the fastest among all the retreating glaciers in the world, which may bring tremendous disasters to peoples in China, India and Nepal, who rely on rivers originating from these glaciers. It indicates that not only the beautiful landscapes, but all lives, would be gone.

When the United Nations set 2002 as the Mountains Year, an officer of the UN Environment Program gave his explanation. He said they did so because they firmly believed that mountains are the most important ecosystem on earth, but at the same time, the environments of mountains are the most fragile. Human activities affect mountain environments and the climate changes are reflected instantly in them. The current happenings of the glaciers are serious warnings for us.

Fortunately, more than 100 nations have signed the *Kyoto Agreement* as an effort to check the globe's increasing warming up. The Chinese government completed its ratification in 2002. When people of all over the world work together, the Himalayas may hopefully remain as charming as it is today.

1. Familiar views become abstractive once viewed from the sky.

2. The Lhasa River seems to run for ever.

Travel Tips

Chartered aircraft:

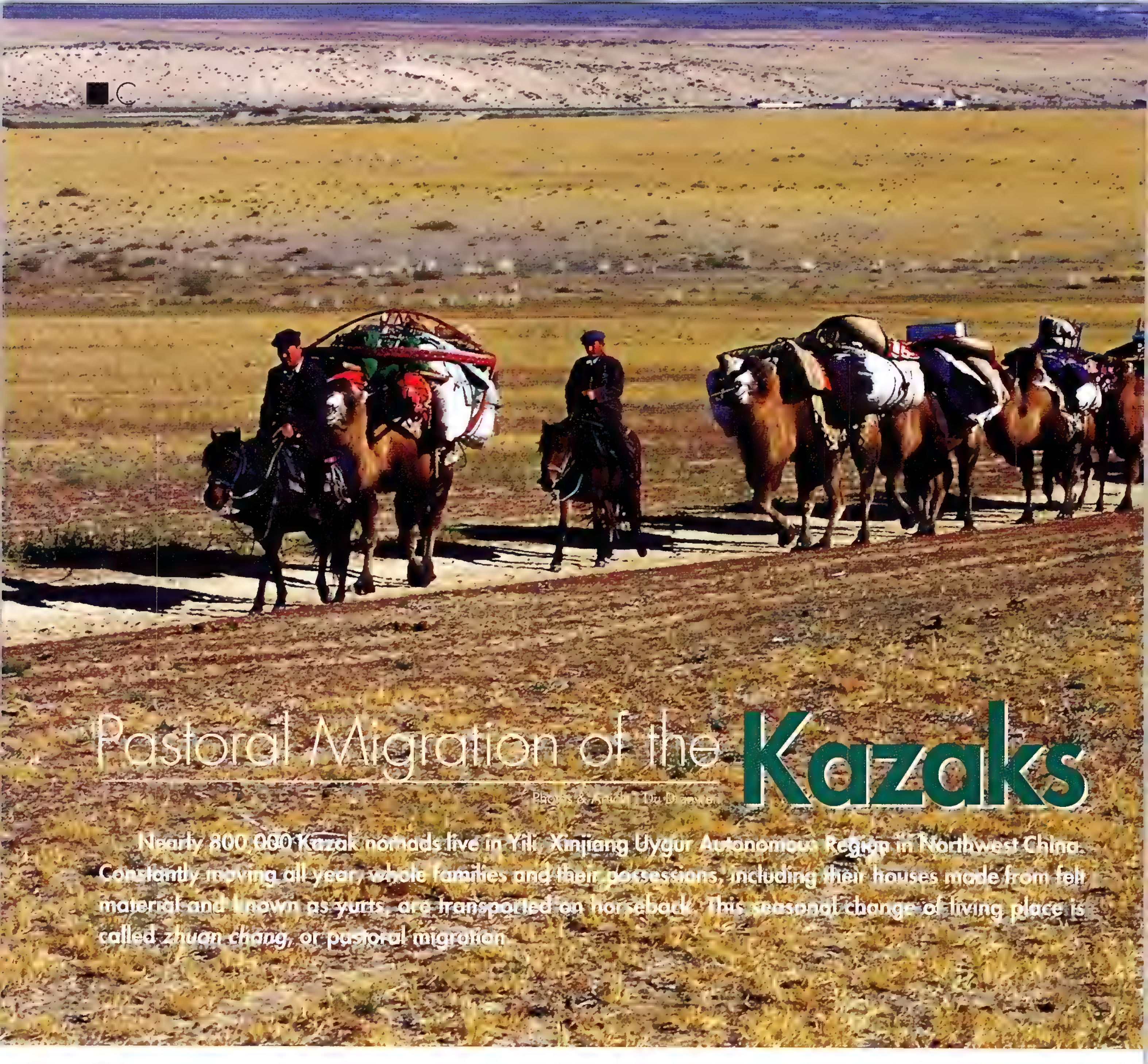
Many travel agencies provide such services and you can check online. Remember to compare at lest three companies to find the best price and service.

Photography:

These photos were mainly taken with Contax lens (45mm~90mm) and Hasselblad X-pan (30mm, 45mm). The latter is very good for aerial photography. All the photos were taken with aperture F5.6 and shutter 1/500 or 1/1,000; the films used were Kodak 100vs. You need faster shutter due to the speedy flight. Meanwhile, you should keep your hands steady. Remember to take photos of different sizes and shot as many as possible for later choice.

Safety Reminder:

It's advised that people suffering high blood pressure and heart disease should not go for such a program. When you see the vibrating scenes, you should try your best to stay calm, as if you get over-excited, your hands will tremble, which may fail your shooting. Lastly, before you aboard an aircraft, you'd better study the topographies and regional references of the area you're going to visit so as to co-operate with the pilot and shoot the best photos.



Pastoral Migration of the Kazaks

Photos & Article | Du Dianwen

Nearly 800,000 Kazak nomads live in Yili, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. Constantly moving all year, whole families and their possessions, including their houses made from felt material and known as yurts, are transported on horseback. This seasonal change of living place is called *zhuan chang*, or pastoral migration.

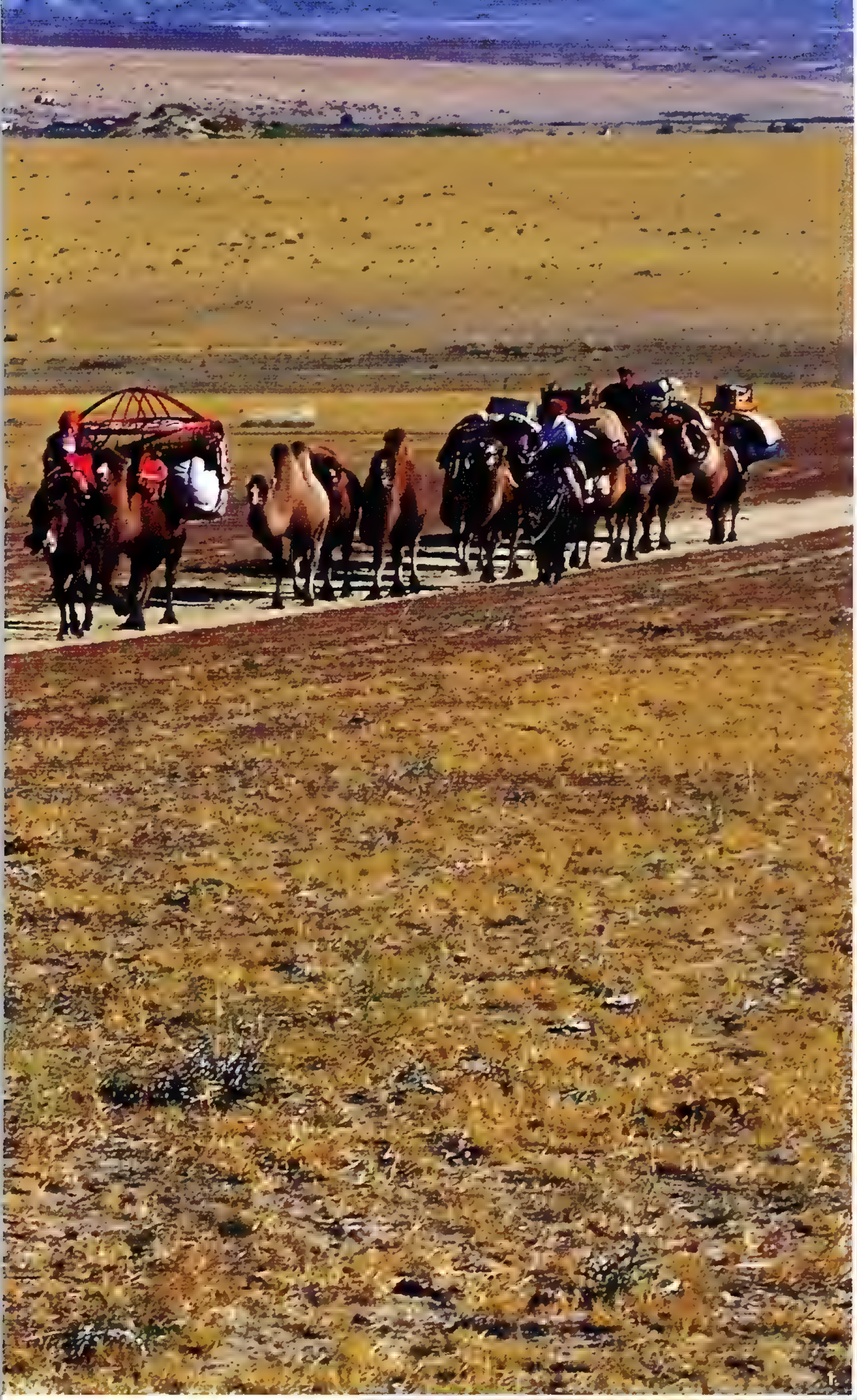
The pastoral migration team I joined was a family group, which included the families of three of the patriarch's six children. Kairat, a widower aged 85 lives with his second son, Erkin. The migrating children were the first, second, and fourth sons. Carrying heavy loads of yurts and lumpy utensils, they rented a truck for 300 yuan to help out. Nine people were in this family group, along with over 400 sheep, 80 head of cattle and 12 load-carrying camels. In local terms, this was a typical pastoral migration team.

20 to 30 Migrations a Year

The old man told me that pastoral migration was part of the Kazak tradition. People were climbing mountains and crossing rivers for the better part of the year. It was a nomadic life in its original sense. People could migrate 20 to 30 times a year spending over 30 to 50 days on the trail and travelling up to 500 to 800 km in total throughout the year. The longest distance for a single migration trip would be well over 100 km, lasting for one week, while the shortest one would be just dozens of kilometres, lasting for a day or two. The procession would stop here and there, but moving remained the theme. The timing of the migration depends on the weather and the pasture. If the pasture was good, the migration would be postponed for a while. On the other hand, it could be early. The nomads' year is governed by the seasons. The time for the best winter pasture is usually from November 10 to March 10, whereas summer pasture is at its prime from May 25 to September 10. The remaining time is spent in the spring and autumn pastures.

Livestock Medical Bath against Plague

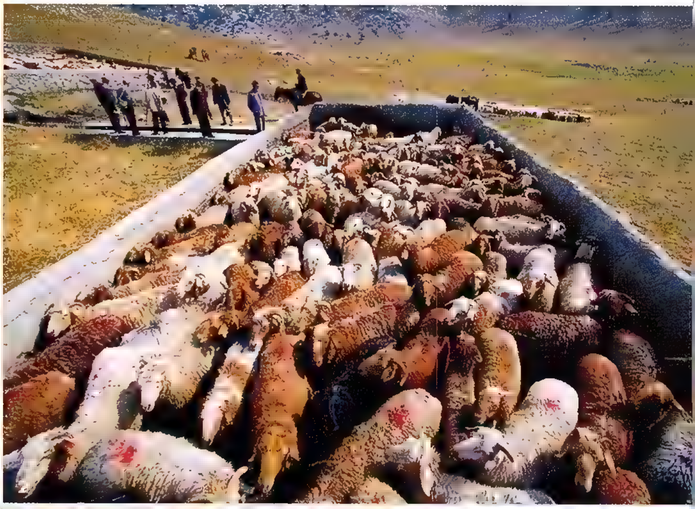
Before any pastoral migration, good preparation

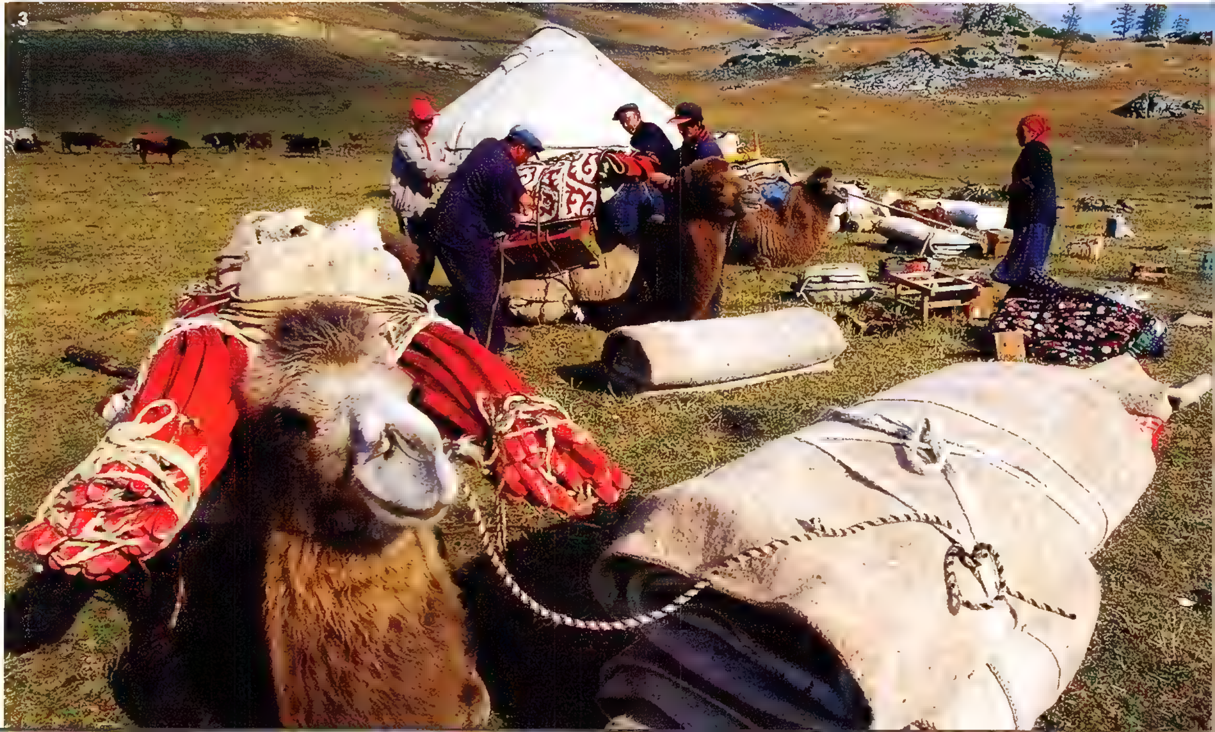


is needed. The sheep are dipped in a chemical bath to prevent plague. The livestock, load-carrying camels and harnesses are readied. One or two days before the migration the feeding of the livestock is reduced, especially for the camels, so that the migration trip will not be disturbed. Herds are gathered and counted to make sure that none will be lost on the road.

The time of pastoral migration for each group is decided by the local township government and early or late requests are not granted. As a usual practice, migrations of different families follow a certain order within a specified time span (five to seven days), and the order of the participating families rotates in the next round of migrations.

At 8:30 a.m., the migration started. The yurts were first disassembled and the utensils and other bits and pieces of daily life were collected and packed. The bundles and packages were put on the camels. The decamping lasted till noon. According to the schedule, the migration team would arrive at Hailiutan on day one, Huopa on day two and Keyikebai on day three. Mountains with gurgling springs surround

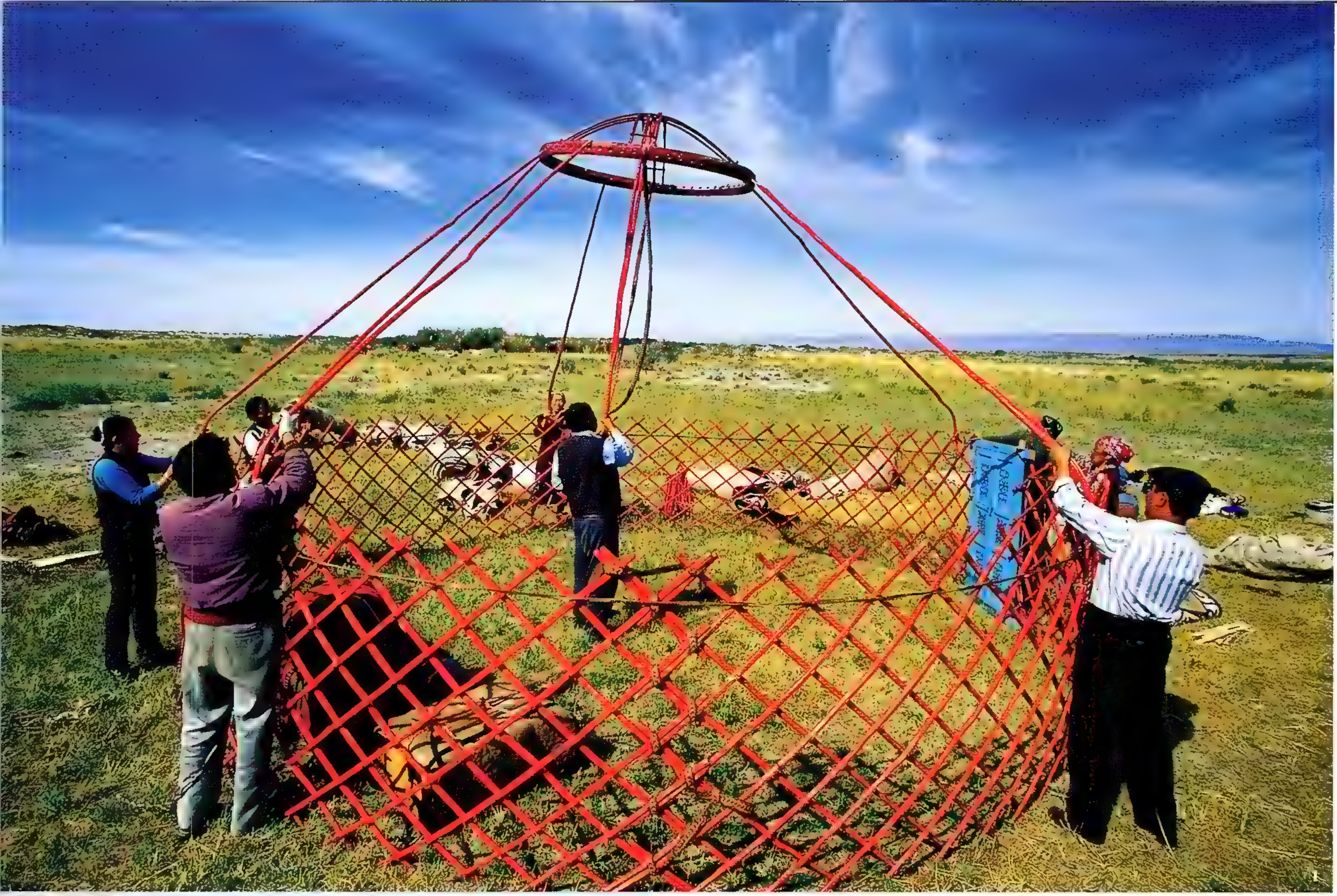




1. The pastoral migration team of Kairat and his family heading from Huopa to Keyikebai.

2. A medical bath is specially built in the spring and autumn pasture in Ahegonggaiti. The livestock are dipped against plague before they take to the next pasture.

3. As the migration begins, the yurts are taken apart first and the daily utensils gathered and packed. The loads will be eventually put onto the camels. The whole process takes 3 hours.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Hailiutan, about 25 km away from Ahegonggaiti. In the middle of these mountains is a huge, natural basin divided into different pastures with separating wire. In the east of the basin, there are 40 to 50 adobe houses and wooden huts. There are restaurants, shops, hotels, and other facilities. Many migrating nomads and passers-by drop in or stay overnight here. We rented a motorbike at this settlement.

Males as Herd Tenders and Females as Home Movers

The migration team was broken up into two parts: the camel caravan and the herds of sheep and cattle. The most laborious and physically demanding work was herd tending, especially the sheep. Usually, only the strong young men could handle it. On this trip, the Bolati mountain pass presents a stark challenge and is also the only bottleneck in this range of mountains. Both sides of the pass are high mountains with a ravine sandwiched in the middle. In this arduous terrain the rugged clay trail is barely four metres wide and clings to the mountainside. However, there is no alternative on this migration route and as the trail is narrow and steep, accidents often occur. The scared animals squeeze each other to death as they struggle to avoid the edge or sadly, simply fall off the cliff. In the eyes of the nomads, the Bolati pass is an invitation to hell. The young son of Kairat, Baltabek, was in his early 20s. He rode a black violent-tempered horse; whip in hand, shouting all the way. It took him five hours to cover five kilometres. When he crossed the pass, he had lost his voice, and coated in dust.

The work of the women was not easy either. Kairat had two daughters-in-law, each with a child. They were the early risers in the morning. The first task for them was to get hot water and breakfast ready. After that, they helped their husbands to take apart the yurts, pack all household goods and put them on the camels. Pastoral migration sounds like a pleasant journey but is no picnic as all of life's essential must be brought along. Yurts, boxes, and iron stoves make up much of the heavy luggage but there are a myriad of small items such as cans and jars, firewood, axes, milk granules, cheese, fleece and camel wool in sacks and pouches from the summer pasture. When unloaded they would cover a whole basketball court. It would be hard enough just to gather them all up and tie them, let alone loading and unloading them every day. The two hostesses had to work over 14 to 15 hours, but never made any complaint.

Solid Food and Makeshift Yurt

During the migration, the three meals a day were made up of "baursaks", milk tea, milk granules and cheese. "Baursaks" is a Kazak word meaning deep-fried flour lump. It is about half the size of a man's palm, in a square shape. It is deep-fried in sunflower seed oil or sesame oil and mixed with some ghee.

Milk tea is always taken with each meal. Kazak style milk tea differs from other ethnic groups as the milk and tea are separately cooked. When it is served, one or two spoonfuls of milk are put into the container and diluted with tea. Then ghee, white sugar, or salt are added to suit different tastes. People drink their fill.

On the road, nomads live in makeshift yurts. Yurts are of two types. The large one is called otay uy in Kazak, spacious enough for eight to ten persons and an iron stove at the centre. The small one is called boz uy, only enough for two to three persons, without a stove. Makeshift yurts are usually set up in a place sheltered from the wind but exposed to sunshine and facing east. The yurt site is normally placed 50 to 60 metres away from the water source so as not to pollute the stream.

Milk Tea for Passers-by

We discovered that help from fellow nomads was always welcome, although the Kazak worked in their family unit during the migration. Helping others is part of the Kazak tradition and comes naturally to these unselfish and free people. Before we set off, nearby nomads, including the township and village cadres, came to help and see us off. At places on our migration route, either at the camp or by the roadside, local Kazak nomads would serve passers-by with milk tea and baursaks. Hospitality is mutual; Kairat and his family did the same for others.

Among our discoveries was the great care that the Kazak took of their camels and horses during the migration. Upon arrival at a campsite, the first duty was to unload the burdens off the camels and the saddles from the horses. Then they would be allowed to graze on the best pasture and given plenty of water. If the animals required more food, they would be given extra mouthfuls of mash. The loads for camels were also specially packaged with the hard objects such as wood and iron utensils covered with special felt covers so as not to scratch or injure the animals. For the Kazak, the horse has a supreme position in their hearts and the horses owned by each nomad are rarely loaned to another. Whipping the horse or using threatening behavior toward it is considered an insult to the horse master.

Just after three in the afternoon on the third day, we arrived at Keyikebai. In 20 days, Kairat and his family would move again to Ahongtubieke then on to Mt Shawu'er and other places. This tradition will continue through the next year and the next' simply knowing they will keep revisiting these places provides the certainty in a nomadic life.

Translated by Zhang Boli

1. Upon Kairat's arrival at Keyikebai, work starts on the yurts, their homes for the next 20 days.

2. During the migration, a nomad shampoos his hair. Modernity has crept onto the steppes.

3. Kairat and his family share their staple food, "baursaks".

4. Pastoral migration is no picnic; all daily items need to be carried. Camels and horses provide the best transport.

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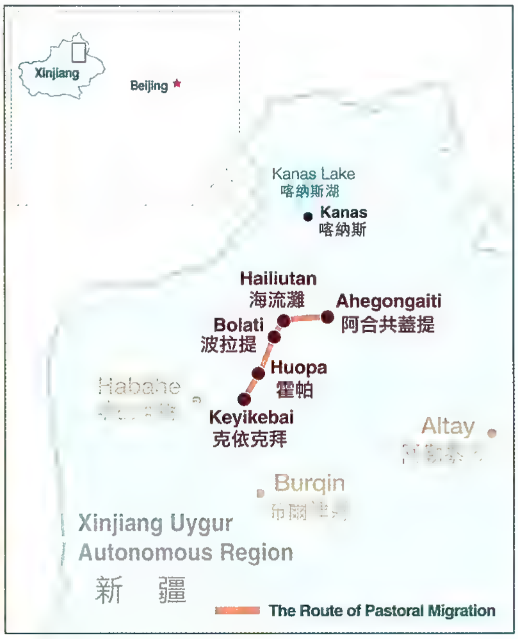

A meaningful and enjoying trip does not always mean to spend a lot from your wallet. This can be best applied to those backpackers who carry bulky bags travelling through different unknown boundaries from time to time.

Home of Backpackers

Photos & Article · Chen Tuanjie

Xi'an Youth Hostel

Inside the youth hostels situated at the west of the South Gate in Xi'an ancient city, Shaanxi Province, you can immediately feel the warmth and intimacy through those rosewood furniture, corns at the door edge and little chilly. Backpackers from different countries are magneted to stay here, tasting Chinese tea or traditional Chinese cuisine, or even casually walking barefoot with a towel around the body. The hostel can be described as a "big family".

The "United Nation" in a Small Village

I was told that of the visitors are foreigners, and most backpackers will reserve the rooms online in advance. They will be picked up by the staff when they arrive. What's more, the hostels adopt a DIY approach which means that visitors can take anything they want, e.g. drinks from the fridge provided they will pay for them when check out. This is all built up on trust.

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Hand-wash is free, but it charges when using the washing machine. The room rent is basically less than a hundred dollars, which is much more reasonable then the hotel rent in towns. However, there is no washroom, toothbrush or soap provided so tourists must bring their own. The arrangement of beds is special, too. Different kinds of bed are arranged arbitrarily at different rooms, and tourists are also assigned with beds arbitrarily according to the order of check-in, meaning that some females may need to sleep in the same room with the males. Nevertheless, they never feel embarrassed about it.

On the other hand, the hostel service is a nice and comprehensive one. Fridges, internet bars, mini-supermarkets, mini-bars, foot-massage rooms and table-tennis rooms can all be found there.

Experience the Unique Chinese Cuisine Culture

Entering the house, you can see a group of foreigners trying the traditional Chinese dumplings on a large round table. A volunteer explains the making of dumplings (*jiao zi*) in English, but the foreigners seem to be too interested and have started making already. They are so eager to try. Although they are from different places of the world like Britain, France, American or Sweden, they all experience the traditional culture of Chinese Cuisine enthusiastically altogether.

"It is so free-minded to stay here since it is just like my family. The unique history and personalities of the ancient city here also attract me a lot because I can never have such a feeling elsewhere." said a visitor from Germany who has been staying for a week. He has travelled to Beijing, Gansu, and then to Xi'an. He particularly loves the sense of serenity in Xi'an.

In the hostel, you can try a lot of traditional food snacks apart from western ones. You may also relax yourselves at one of the bars at night after dinner, listening to some soft music.

Foreign Volunteer at Youth Hostel

A foreigner is serving a customer in carefully spoken Mandarin. He, a young man from the Netherlands, admires Chinese culture, He was once a manager of an import and export fashion company in Netherlands. He resigned and the came to Xi'an to be a volunteer responsible for taking

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the tourists to and from the youth hostels. He receives not even a cent at all.

"Most tourists just come here to visit the Terracotta Warriors, but actually there are a lot more interesting things to see in Xi'an. I stay here not just to visit those tourist spots but also to understand the history, culture and customs." said Li Bai delightfully.

Every time when Li Bai is asked for how long he will continue to be a volunteer, he replies with a smile,"Maybe a month, a year, or even forever! Only when I don't like this city one day I will choose to leave."

As a Chinese saying goes, "People depend on their parents at home, and their friends when they leave home." One can read the messages on the message board and we can know many strangers have become travelling partners eventually. Although it is just a stop for those backpackers to stay in the youth hostel, we can still be able to feel the happiness through the messages.

Translated by Jamie Wong

1. Backpackers travelling freely
2. Classic Chinese outlook of Shuyuan Youth Hostel
3. Backpackers planning their next trip with new partners
4. Portrait of President Mao and traditional paper-cutting handcrafts release strong Chinese flavours
5. A foreigner concentrates in practicing Chinese calligraphy
6. Sharing their first DIY Chinese dishes
7. The hostel contains a sense of family to foreign visitors

Highlights of International Youth Hostels (visit www.yhachina.com for more details)

1. Xi'an Shuyuan Hostel
Add: 2 Shun Cheng Xiang Jia, Da Nan Men Nei Xi, Xi'an, Shaanxi
Tel: (29) 8728 7720/ 8728 7721 Fax: (29) 8728 7720
Rate: 40 yuan/ bed (member), 50 yuan/ bed (non-member)
E-mail: shuyuanhostel@yahoo.com

2. Xinjiang Bai Hualin Int'l Youth Hostel
Add: 28 Nan Hu Lu, Urümqi, Xinjiang
Tel: (991) 4881 428
Rate: 35 yuan/ bed (member), 40 yuan/ bed (non-member)

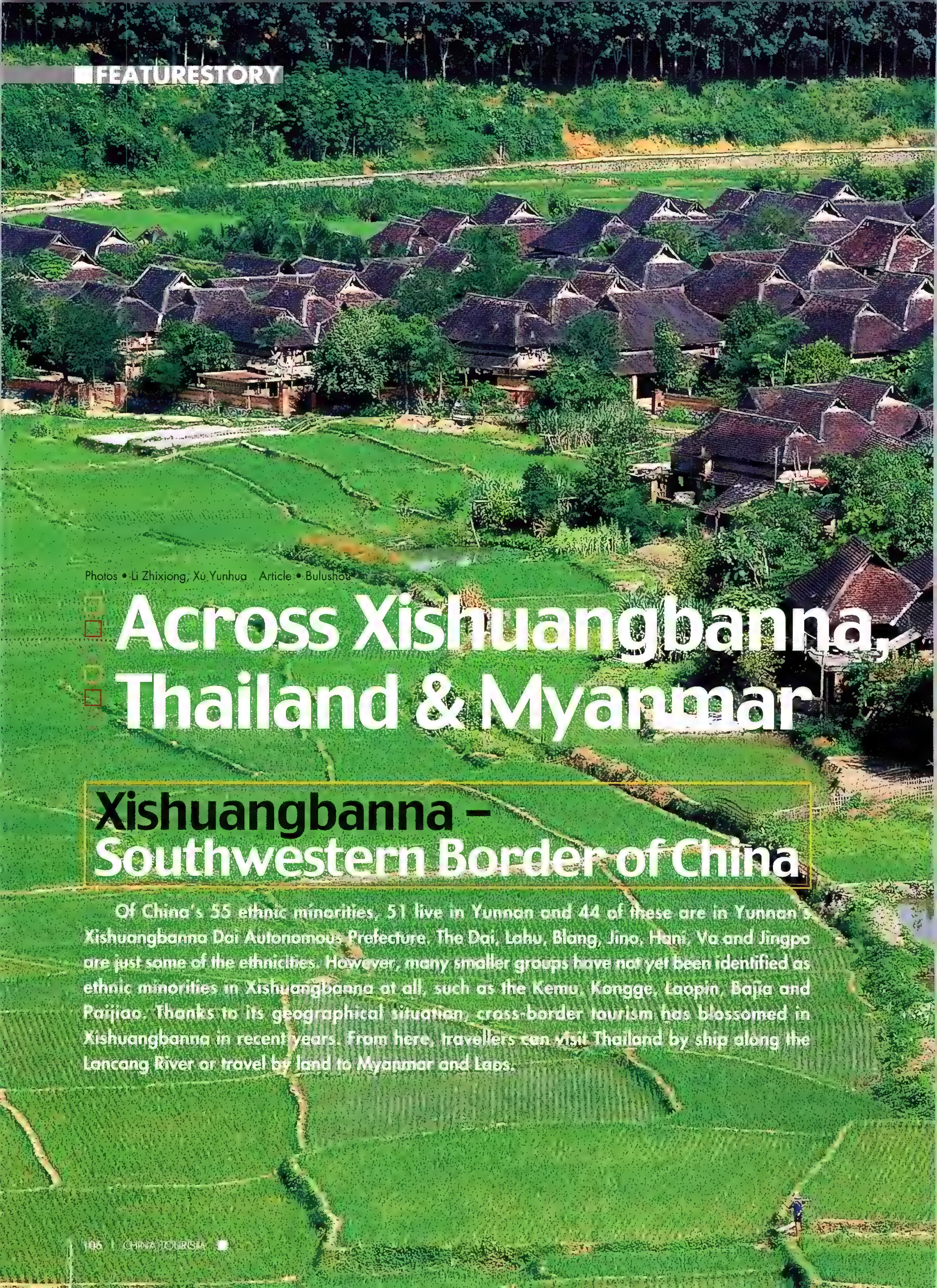
3. Inner Mongolia Binyue Hotel Int'l Youth Hostel
Add: Mid-section of Zhao Wu Da Lu, Sai Han Qu, Hohhot, Inner Mongolia
Tel: (471) 6605 666 Fax: (471) 4310 808
Rate: 30 yuan/ bed (member), 40 yuan/ bed (non-member)

4. Tibet Yuanye Riguang Int'l Youth Hostel
Add: 27 Lin Ju Lu, Lhasa, Tibet
Tel: (891) 6910 999/ 6338 866/ 6322 227 Fax: (891) 6330 175
Rate: 35 yuan/ bed (member), 45 yuan/ bed (non-member)

5. Chengdu Linye Int'l Youth Hostel
Add: 6 Ren Min Bei Lu, Chengdu, Sichuan
Tel: (28) 8341 6580 Fax: (28) 8336 4547
Rate: 20 yuan/ bed (member), 30 yuan/ bed (non-member)

6. Lijiang Ancient Town Int'l Youth Hostel
Add: 44 Mishi Xiang, Xinyi Jie, Dayan Town, LiJiang, YunNan
Rate: 15 yuan/ bed (member), 20 yuan/ bed (non-member)

7. Harbin Xiaoshanshu Int'l Youth Hostel
Add: 83 Xue Fu Lu, Nan Gang Qu, Harbin, Heilongjiang
Tel: (451) 8300 5009/ 8300 5008 Fax: (451) 8300 5008
Rate: 20 yuan/ bed (member), 25 yuan/ bed (non-member)

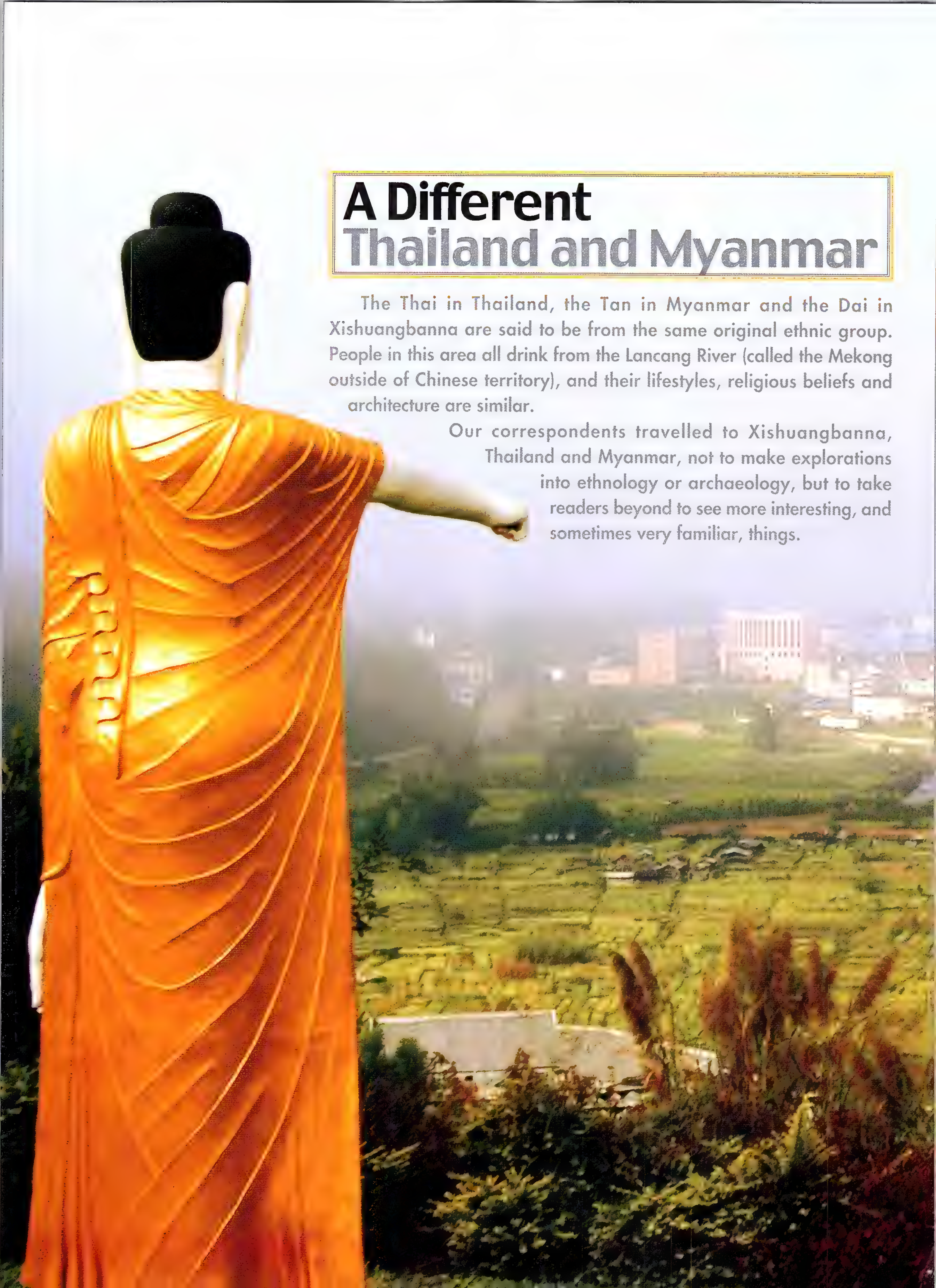


Photos • Li Zhixiong, Xu Yunhua   Article • Bulushou

Across Xishuangbanna, Thailand & Myanmar

Xishuangbanna – Southwestern Border of China

Of China's 55 ethnic minorities, 51 live in Yunnan and 44 of these are in Yunnan's Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. The Dai, Lahu, Blang, Jino, Hani, Va and Jingpo are just some of the ethnicities. However, many smaller groups have not yet been identified as ethnic minorities in Xishuangbanna at all, such as the Kemu, Kongge, Laopin, Bajia and Paijiao. Thanks to its geographical situation, cross-border tourism has blossomed in Xishuangbanna in recent years. From here, travellers can visit Thailand by ship along the Lancang River or travel by land to Myanmar and Laos.

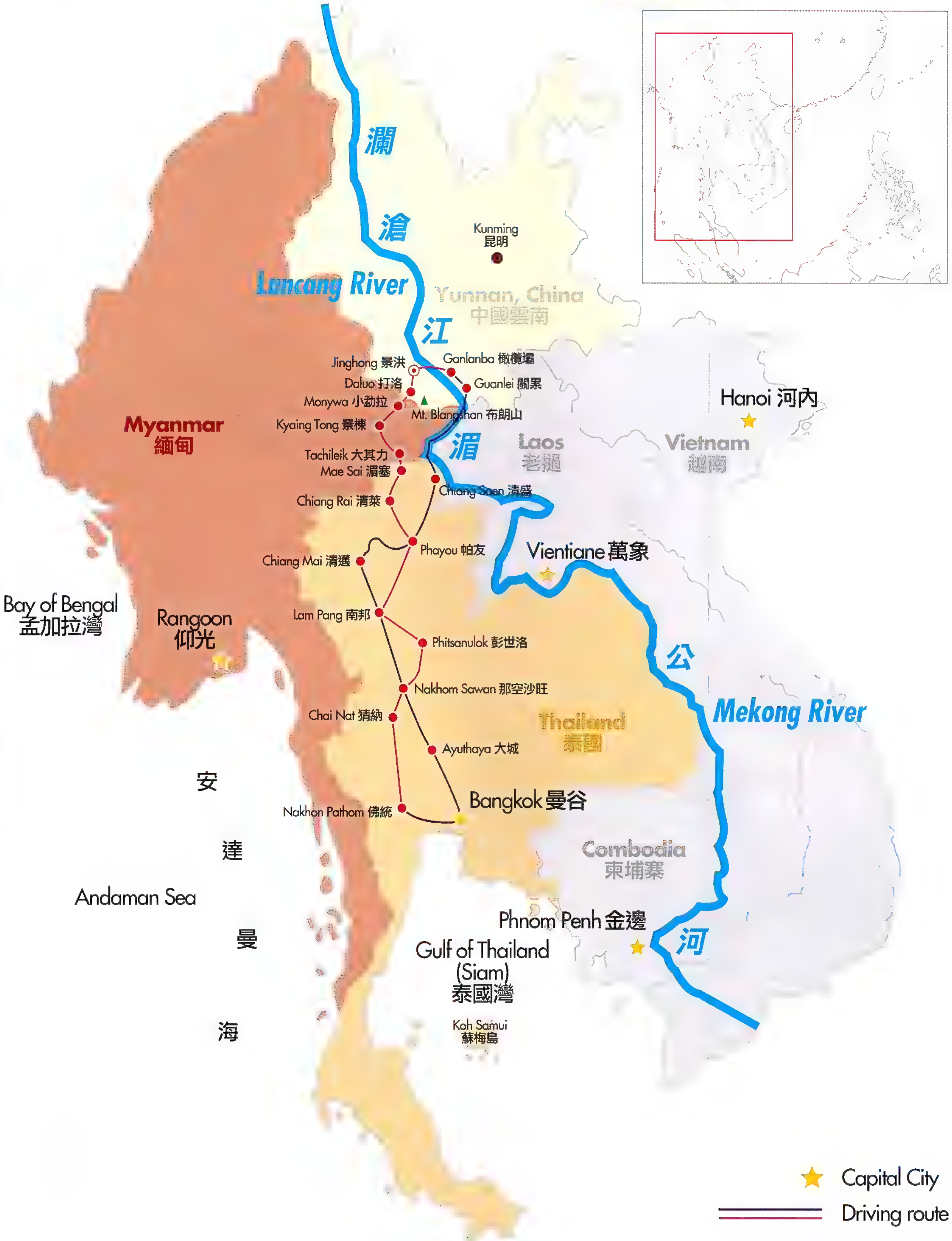


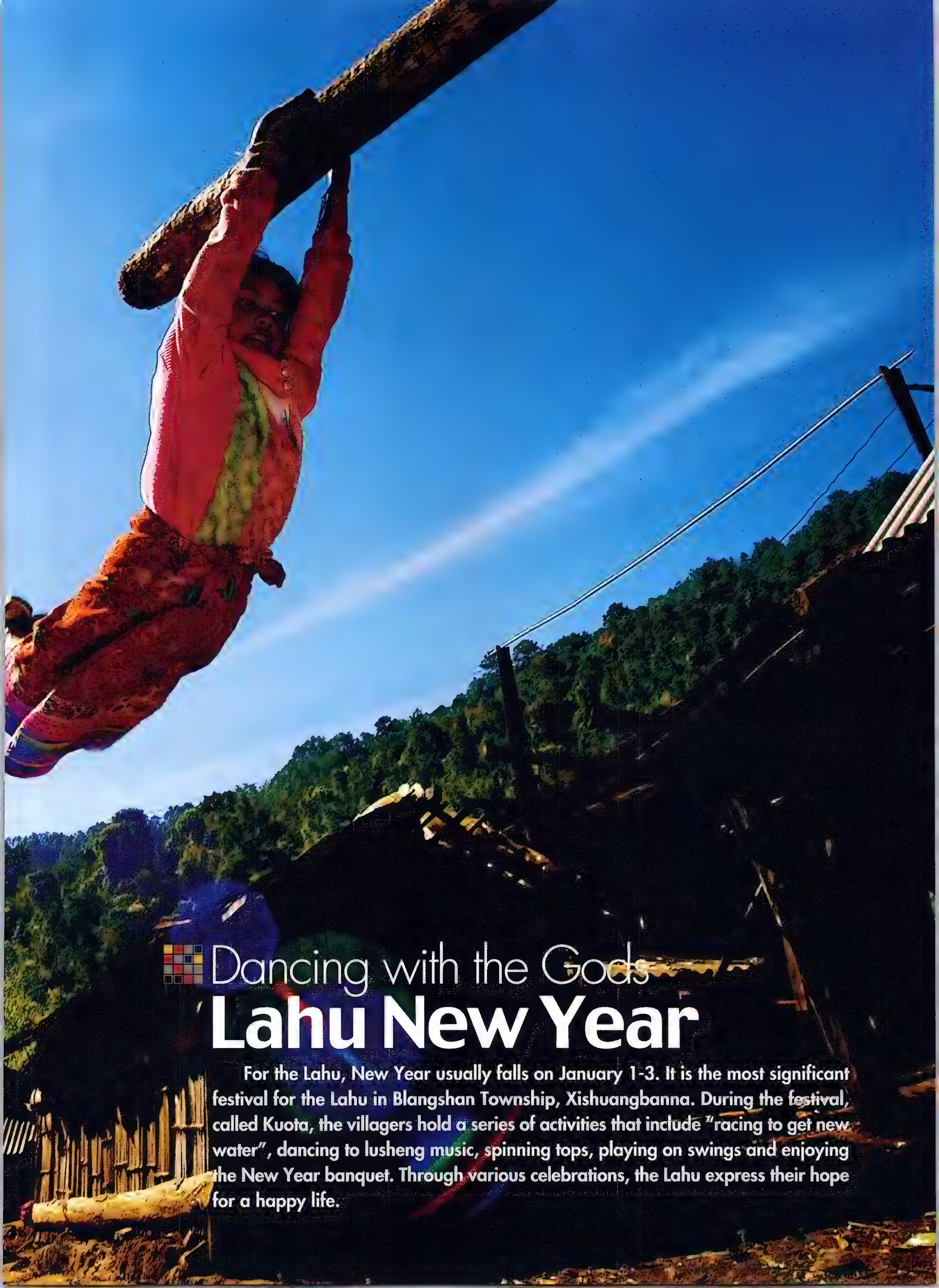
A Different Thailand and Myanmar

The Thai in Thailand, the Tan in Myanmar and the Dai in Xishuangbanna are said to be from the same original ethnic group. People in this area all drink from the Lancang River (called the Mekong outside of Chinese territory), and their lifestyles, religious beliefs and architecture are similar.

Our correspondents travelled to Xishuangbanna, Thailand and Myanmar, not to make explorations into ethnology or archaeology, but to take readers beyond to see more interesting, and sometimes very familiar, things.

□□□ Tourist Map of Yunnan (China), Thailand, Myanmar


瀾
滄
Lancang River
江
Kunming
昆明
Yunnan, China
中國雲南
Jinghong 景洪
Ganlanba 橄欖壩
Daluo 打洛
Guanlei 關累
Monywa 小勐拉
Mt. Blangshan 布朗山
Kyaing Tong 景棟
湄
Myanmar
緬甸
Laos
老撾
Vietnam
越南
Hanoi 河內
Tachileik 大其力
Mae Sai 湄塞
Chiang Saen 清盛
Chiang Rai 清萊
Phayou 帕友
Vientiane 萬象
Chiang Mai 清邁
Bay of Bengal
孟加拉灣
Rangoon
仰光
Lam Pang 南邦
Phitsanulok 彭世洛
公
Nakhom Sawan 那空沙旺
Mekong River
Chai Nat 猜納
Thailand
泰國
Ayuthaya 大城
安
Bangkok 曼谷
Nakhon Pathom 佛統
達
Combodia
柬埔寨
Andaman Sea
曼
Phnom Penh 金邊
河
Gulf of Thailand
(Siam)
泰國灣
海
Koh Samui
蘇梅島
★ Capital City
Driving route



Dancing with the Gods

Lahu New Year

For the Lahu, New Year usually falls on January 1-3. It is the most significant festival for the Lahu in Blangshan Township, Xishuangbanna. During the festival, called Kuota, the villagers hold a series of activities that include "racing to get new water", dancing to lusheng music, spinning tops, playing on swings and enjoying the New Year banquet. Through various celebrations, the Lahu express their hope for a happy life.

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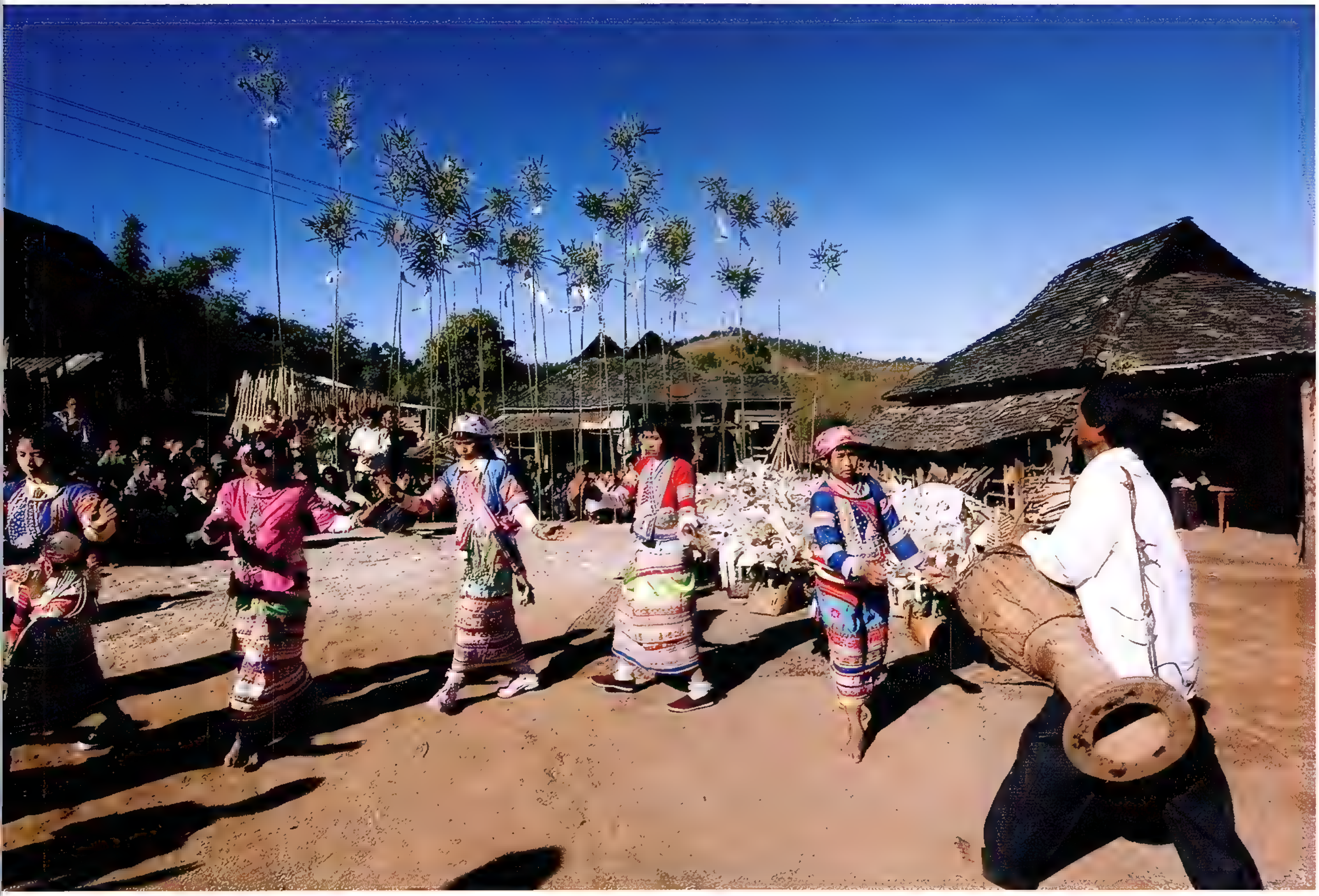
The Lahu ethnic group, totalling about 400,000, mainly live in the Lancang River valley and the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. Banmai, the village I visited in Blangshan Township in Menghai County, Xishuangbanna, has 54 households and 400 villagers. Their houses, all with handrails as they are scattered across the slopes, are wrapped in an ancient atmosphere. The people, old and young, men and women, were all busily preparing for the New Year celebrations when I arrived. Their pleasant demeanours made this faraway stranger feel happy, too.



Complicated New Year Preparations

Like other Lahus, the villagers of Manmai celebrate New Year from January 1-3. Before the festival day arrives, there is much to do: sew new clothes, clean the village and carve new lusheng (gourd flutes) and tops. Each step is important. For example, if the village is not cleaned, and new stakes are not planted, the village will not be prosperous; if a woman does not sew new clothes, she will feel ashamed; and, if a young man does not have a new lusheng, it will be hard for him to find a girlfriend.

On New Year's Eve, every household makes baba ("cake" in the Lahu language) with glutinous rice. They cut the cake into small pieces and place them on knives, axes, hoes and other farming tools to show thanks for their good service in the fields, which in turn guaranteed them plenty of food throughout the previous year. It is also a way of praying for favourable weather and a bumper harvest for the coming year. On this day, the Lahu also "lock" their village by hanging taliao over the gate to prevent evil spirits from entering. Meanwhile, each family invites the spirits of their ancestors into their homes to celebrate the New Year and presents rice cakes as offerings to the Mountain God.

"Racing for new water" is another important activity. Early on New Year's Day, young villagers prepare to fetch water from the spring with their new bamboo tubes. The "new water" symbolizes happiness and purity. Whoever gets to it first will be the happiest and his crops, melons and other fruit will ripen earlier than those of others, bringing good luck in the coming years. After carrying the new water home, they boil it and ask the elderly family members to wash their faces with it. When the young show respect for the elderly in this way, the latter tie threads on the youths as expressions of their good wishes and encouragement.

Slaughtering a Sacrificial Ox

The ox offering is one of the more exciting New

Previous page: During their new year festival, the Lihu enjoy swinging and playing with tops, activities that reflect their vitality and their hopes for the future. (by Li Zhixiong)

1. Bamboo is just one type of sacrifice made to the spirits. (by Xu Yunhua)

2. Sacrificial offerings made from husks of rice are placed in the centre of the village. (by Xu Yunhua)

3. After the elders finish making their offerings, young ladies entertain with dances and songs. (by Xu Yunhua)

Year events. When the New Year approaches, the villagers pool their money together and then draw lots to decide who will go down the mountain to buy the ox. After the slaughter, the villagers divide the beef and internal organs into 54 equal packs, one for each household. Against my better judgement, I asked how they decided who got the eyes and was told that the head would be retained. Suddenly, we were surrounded by children and women holding washing basins or banana leaves in which to carry their portions home to prepare for the ceremony.

Esha: Guardian God of the Lahu

The bottle gourd is important in primitive Lahu culture. The Lahu believe human beings were born from this special kind of gourd, and it is also credited with saving them from floods. Lusheng dance remains popular among the Lahu and people use gourds to fetch water. Every family worships a gourd passed down from their ancestors.

The Lahu believe Esha controls everything in the human world; it is the most powerful guardian god of their village. For the Lahu, everything in life, including marriage, illness and death, is linked to Esha. After the sacrificial ceremony ended, the villagers, both men and women, held hands to form a circle and perform the Lusheng Dance. Every face looked content, reminding me of the literal meaning of the word Lahu—"La" for holding hands and being united and "hu" for happiness. Their dance is a vivid demonstration of this. Following suit I, too, danced in the hope that I might become even happier.

Swinging for a Good Harvest

Another activity was taking turns on a special swing hung from two wooden poles. Dressed in their ethnic clothing, the villagers enjoyed themselves on the makeshift swing. A child had just finished when a bald-headed woman close to 60 climbed on and began swinging. Many Lahu women shave their heads. One reason is to keep the wild beasts they hunt from seizing their hair; the other is that it shows they are married.

Each of the swing's poles has a meaning: the vertical one represents the column of a house, and the horizontal one, the beam. As the swing goes up and down, it means grain is filling the barn. So by swinging people express their wish for a good harvest.

Spinning in the New Year

Playing with tops is a masculine game here. Players divided into two groups, each carrying their tops to the centre of the village. When Group A spun a top, Group B spun one in to try to hit it. The player who hit the target continued to try hitting the next one, until all of Group A's tops were gone.

1. After the spinning top contest, the male villagers gather to share the first meal of the new year. (by Xu Yunhua)

2. According to tradition, the Lahu slaughter pigs and oxen during their new year festival and divide up the meat equally among all the households. (by Xu Yunhua)

3. A Lahu man does his best to spin his top to victory. (by Li Zhixiong)

4. Preparing various offerings to ensure a bumper harvest in the coming year. (by Xu Yunhua)

Did you know?

Dogs are important to the Lahu. Wherever I went, up or down the mountain, in the village, and whether I was out walking or inside having a meal, I saw lots of dogs everywhere. I thought they must have been raised to guard the houses, but was told the dog means much more to the Lahu. Believing a dog was once their saviour, they respect it as a holy animal. The beating and slaughtering of dogs is forbidden, and when they have their festival meals, they always feed the dogs first. The Lahu also believe dogs can bring them grain seeds and bumper harvests.

When the spinning whip broke, which happened sometimes, the players were delighted because this meant their harvest would be so large and heavy that the rope on a shoulder pole would not be able to bear the weight. I was enchanted watching them play and admired the fantastic flying tops that, with their speedy revolutions, seemed to be declaring the advance of time and the coming of the New Year.

Sharing the New Year Meal

During the festival days, every household prepares New Year food to share with friends, relatives and even people from nearby villages. The banquet is served in the village square.

Every family brought their own dishes and placed them on small, round rattan tables all lined up. But only male villagers attended the banquet; women and children ate at home. The meal began with the worshipping of the tops, on which they stuck glutinous rice and dripped wine.

Turns were taken at each table: after diners enjoyed the dishes at one table for a short while, someone gave an order and everyone advanced to the next table. It is the local custom, I was told, to ensure a good harvest for the coming year. Though the dishes and wine on each table were almost identical, we went through several dozen tables in a full afternoon. It was indeed the longest meal I've ever had in my life.

Celebrate a Lahu New Year

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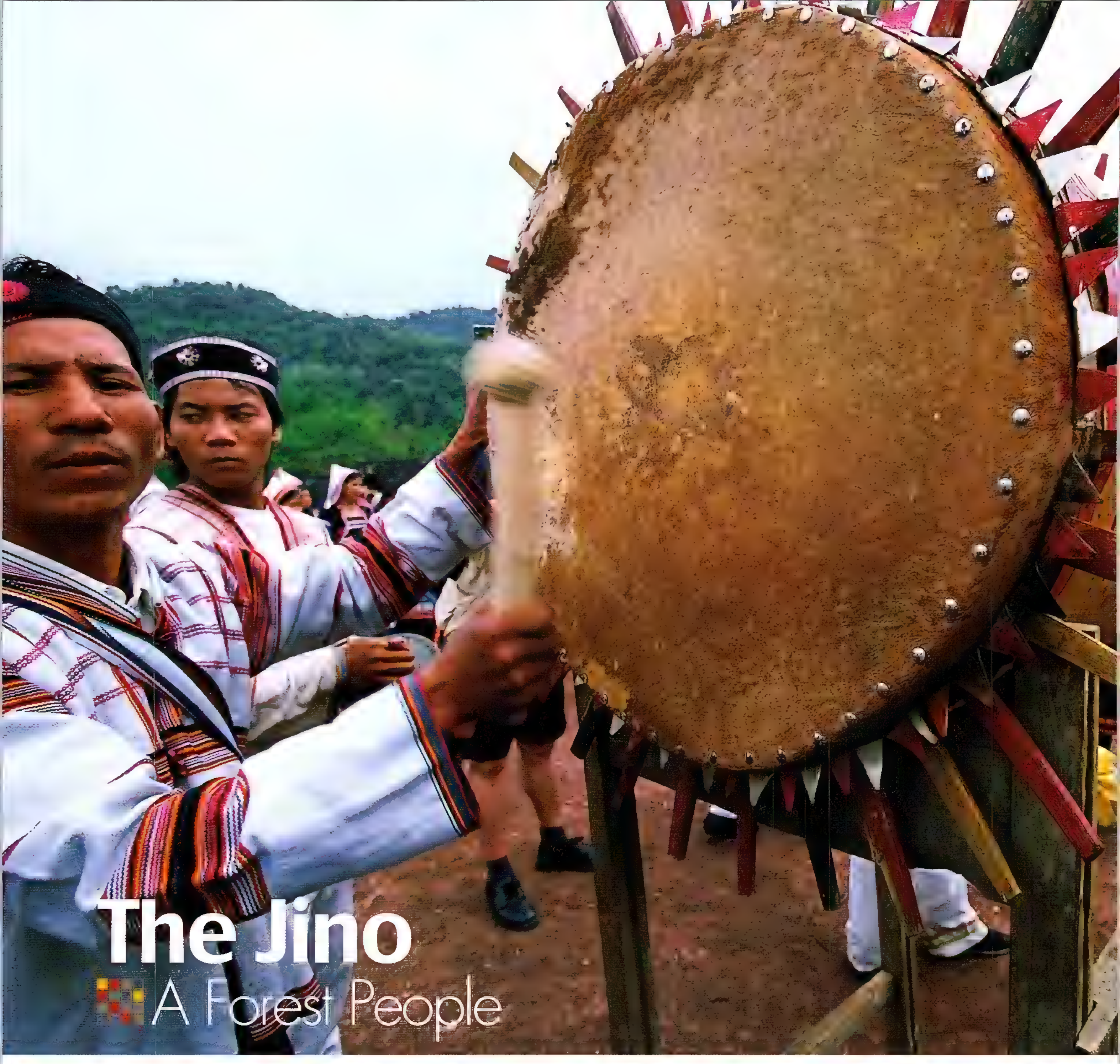
New Year Celebrations: [illegible]

Transport: [illegible]



The Jino

A Forest People

1. Admiring the sun, the Jino strike the Sun Drum during festivals. (by Chan Yat Nin)

2. The Jino turn natural resources into everyday utensils, including water bottles and drinking cups. (by Xu Yunhua)

3. A Jino village. (by Xu Yunhua)

Of China's 55 minority ethnic groups, the Jino are the latest to have been officially identified. Numbering less than 20,000, they call the forests of Xishuangbanna their only home. I took advantage of a rare opportunity to visit a Jino village, where I got to know these kind and lovely people and may have even become one of them.

I set off from Jinghong before daybreak and drove to Lesser Puxi Village in Jinoshan Township. Eventually, our jeep was swallowed up by a thick forest deep in the mountains. Endless rolling ridges encircled us. In the native language, "Jino" means "ancestors of the maternal uncle", or "a nationality that respects the uncle". An uncle occupies a vital position in a Jino family. His power to make decisions is almost equal to that of the father in major matters concerning the children, including approving marriages and naming newborns.

Flowers: Nature's Earrings

The temperature on Jino Mountain can soar as high as 39°C, and the area is blanketed in humidity all year round. To combat the moisture, villagers hang a rattan basket over the fireplace in which they dry their daily necessities and grains. They also put their tea leaves in the basket to keep them from going off. In time, the tea leaves become

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smoked. When we arrived, the villagers welcomed us with their own Pu'er tea brew. The tea was not as dark as the Pu'er we usually have, but it was wonderfully sweet.

Our hosts greeted us in traditional Jino costume. One young lady, Zhewu, caught my attention. With her fine dark skin and bright eyes, she was the prettiest young woman in the village. She also spoke the Han language and was the only female student in Jinghong. That explained the confidence in her eyes.

I was curious about the villagers' clothing and appearance. Many of the older people had large holes in their earlobes through which they wore flowers like earrings. It made for a delightful blend of man and nature. The holes symbolize courage and industriousness. Some of the Jino widen the

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holes to as much as five centimetres in diameter. The flowers they wear can express different moods or feelings.

The women wore triangular hats decorated with black patterns on a white background. They also stitched red and black lace onto the cuffs of their sleeves and their coat hems. The back of one man's coat sported a square of red cloth and a "sunflower", a symbol of love.

Although the Jino have no written language, they have passed many interesting stories down the generations orally. I love their legends. And the sight of the Jino in ethnic costume walking in the mountains, blossoms dangling from their ears, reminded me of both their charm and their bravery.

All-purpose Banana Leaves

The everyday lives of the Jino are as fantastic as the plots of their mysterious stories. They cleverly fashion natural materials into all sorts of items for daily use. Their pots and spoons are made from bamboo crafted in harmony with the material's natural shape. On New Year's Day, the villagers slaughtered an ox and cooked it in one such pot over the fireplace. When the women washed the cooking pot, they scrubbed it with a banana leaf. They also used the leaves like oven mitts to avoid burning their hands on the hot pot, and they wrapped and roasted fish in the leaves, too. In their kitchens, the banana leaf is the miracle utensil. The Jino truly deserve the honour of "the ethnic group of the forest".

I followed what sounded like drumbeats to find the male villagers pulverizing the meat and vegetables for our meal. In traditional Jino cooking, raw food is prepared by mashing it. As a forest tribe, the Jino often eat wild vegetables and game. This is one of their recipes: when there is meat, they grind it and mix it with hot pepper, ginger, mint leaves and salt and serve it uncooked. The dish looked like ground beef to me. I was then told that tadpoles and ant eggs were also eaten this way. I thanked them and left hurriedly, hoping those would not be served as well.

When lunch was ready, more than a dozen dishes graced the small round table. Along with roast fish and vegetables, there were barbequed strings of diced meat, stewed ox organs, beef soup, the mashed raw beef and ox hide. It seemed that every part of the ox had been made into some sort of dish. It seemed a pity that except for guests, women were not allowed to eat at the table.

Though I had tried raw fish before, I knew I would need courage to sample the mashed raw beef. Hearing my fellow travellers praise it, I was tempted. But I couldn't help thinking it would taste strange, being uncooked. I couldn't make up my mind. So I meekly shouted "one more cup" and shoved more plain rice into my mouth, hoping the host would not notice.

As we were driving away from the village, someone in our group discovered he had left his computer behind. We called the village and said we would come back for it later. The villagers did not know what a computer was, but they thought the thing in the small square box must be very precious. So they wrapped it in a piece of cloth (not, thankfully, in a banana leaf) and sent it down the mountain overnight.

Oh, what a lovely and thoughtful forest people!

Have I Become a Jino?

It was New Year's Day when we arrived at the Jino village, population 53. We met Uncle Chebulu who said he felt he had a special tie with me and would like to give me a name.

"You are named Bulushou, and you are a Jino now." I could not reject it. When naming a child, the father's name is included in the child's name. For example, because my 'father' is Chebulu, I have been named Bulushou. My two 'elder brothers' are Buluyao and Buluzhou. My 'mother' is famous in the village because she shook hands with Mao Zedong during the years of Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s. My family's only piece of property is a light motorcycle.

Following my naming, a ceremony of "eating eggs and tying red thread" was held. Chebulu took red threads from a skein and tied them to my left wrist with two tight knots. Then, holding my hands in his, he said, "I wish you a safe journey. Please remember to come again next year."

I felt guilty because I thought about removing the threads as soon as I left the village. These were not my beliefs, after all. I was flattered by their enthusiasm, but I quickly forgot all about it as I was travelling to Xishuangbanna and Thailand soon afterwards. Only when I avoided an accident in Thailand did I remember the red threads I was wearing.

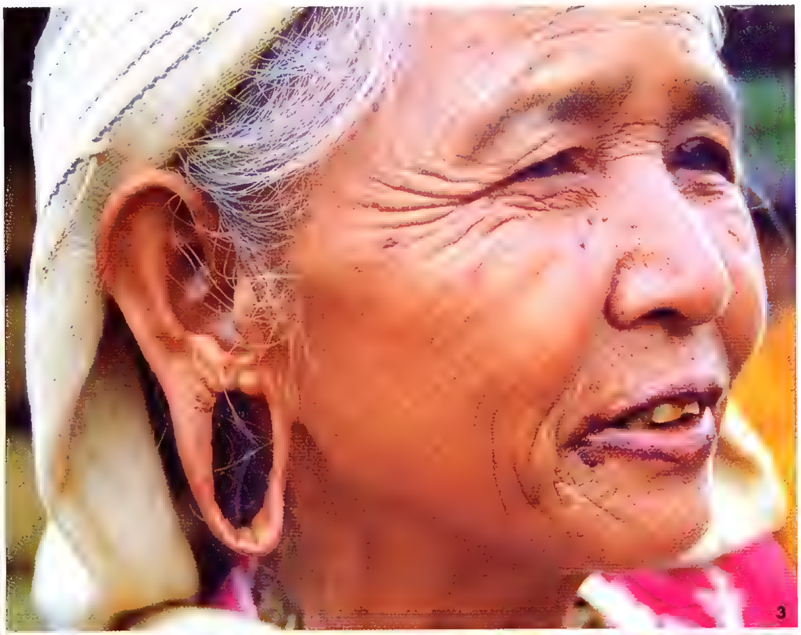
It does not matter whether the red threads protected me or whether it was merely chance that saved me. What is important is that I met Chubulu. I like the idea of being linked to him by the red threads.

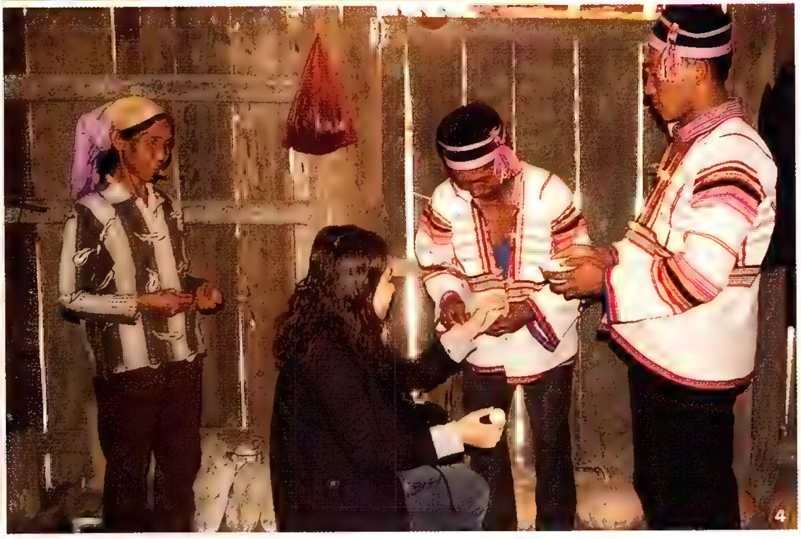
1. Three Jino women make embroidered bags. (by Chan Yat Nin)

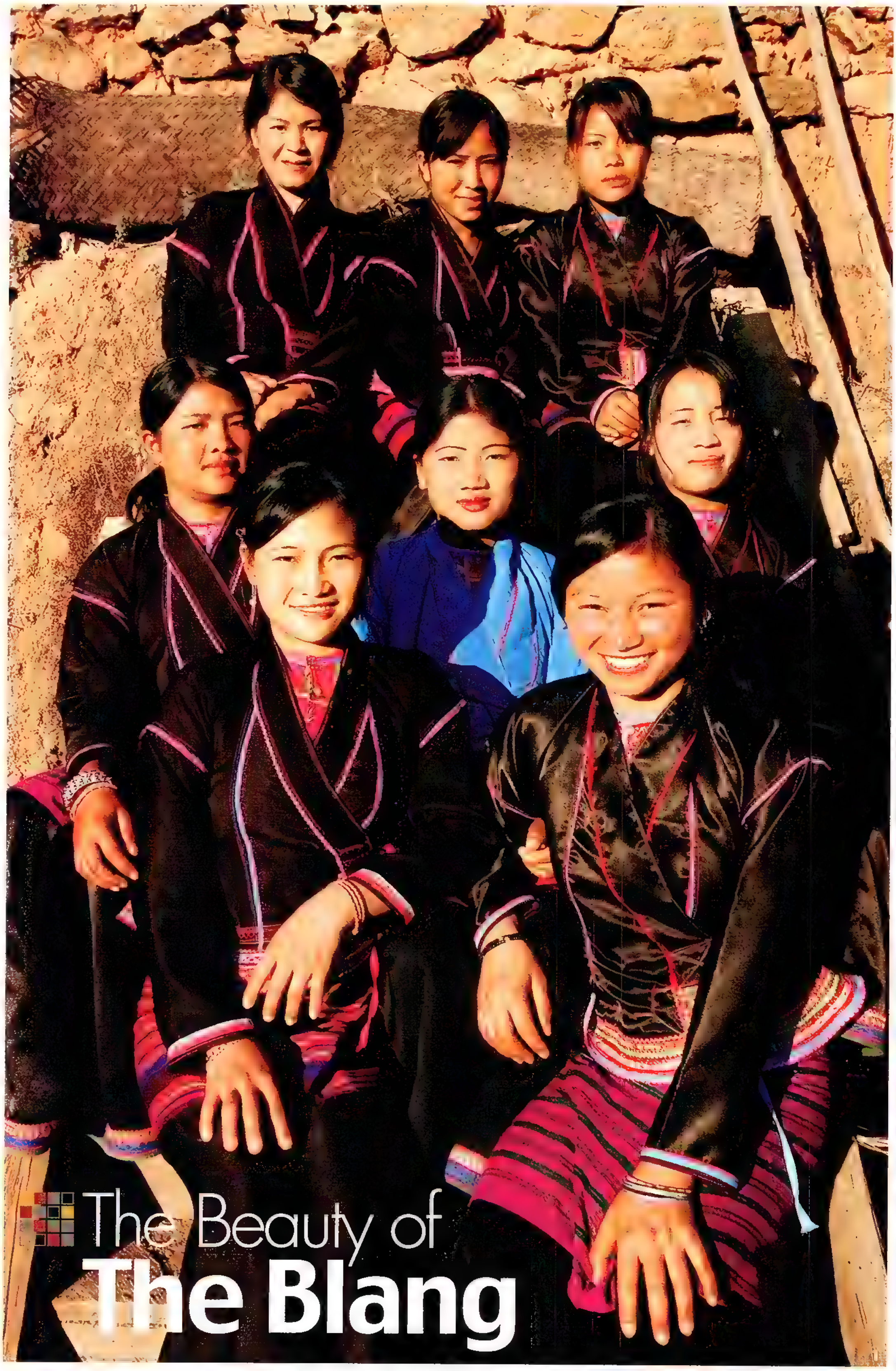
2. Jino women weave and embroider their own clothing. (by Chan Yat Nin)

3. Jino women widen the holes pierced through their earlobes and wear fresh flowers as earrings. (by Xu Yunhua)

4. In Xiaopuxi Village, Uncle Chebulu ties red thread around the author's wrist, welcoming her into the clan. (by Li Zhixiong)







The Beauty of The Blang

The Blang are said to be one of the oldest original ethnic groups of Yunnan Province. Their forefathers have been in this area since the Shang Dynasty (17th—11th century B.C). The ancient village of Zhanglang in the westernmost part of Xishuangbanna, on the China-Myanmar border, is a typical Blang settlement.

Our Blang guide was telling us the story of Nan San Piao as we travelled to Zhanglang Village. "Nan San Piao was the most beautiful of the Blang women, frequently appearing in up to three different charming outfits over the course of a single day. Her renowned beauty scores of attracted rivals for her affection from different tribes. Men quarrelled with one another and eventually fell to fighting over her, which led to many wars between Blang tribes.To bring an end to the fighting and obtain peace and tranquillity, Nan San Piao sacrificed her life. According to her will, she was buried in the ancient city of Jingzang, where she had lived...." Her burial site was not far from the village. Only in such a wonderland could ancient legends be created.

A Secret in the Forest

The village of Zhanglang was quiet when we arrived. Occasionally, we saw elderly villagers in long black skirts, their hair coiled up on their heads. They were taking care of babies. We drove through a thick, well-maintained bamboo grove. The Blang believe everything has a soul. Spirits are thought to be everywhere, with the most important ones residing in forests and mountains. The God of Mountain and Forest, and the God of the Village, are forest-dwellers and play a crucial role in whether the village will be peaceful or filled with turmoil. Trees and plants in the forest must not be cut down or damaged as they are all sacred to the Blang.

The air was cool in the bamboo grove, as the plants had absorbed all the sunshine. I thought about Nan San Piao, who had been buried alive. Apart from the ruins of Jingsang City, many other sites here are linked to the ancient beauty, such as the Hair-Washing Spring, the Stone Horse Circle and the Fairy Tomb. We had been moving closer to her when our vehicle suddenly stopped. A heavy rainfall earlier that morning had turned the road to mud and our wheels sank into deep ruts.

Encountering Blang Girls

With great effort, we pulled the jeep out of the muck, but we had to abandon our plans. Just then several teenaged Blang girls appeared. Each carried a bundle of grass in her hands. They pressed their hands together and paid homage to a pile of stones at the entrance to the road then left their bundles on the stone pile. The girls, from 14 to 18, were very pretty in their ethnic costumes. When I asked what they were doing, they said they were feeding Nan San Piao's horse.

I could not help smiling broadly. These were real-life Nan San Piaos. After explaining the reason for my visit, I asked them to guide me through their village. I learned some of their names. Yuxiang, Yunan'er and Yunanyan talked and laughed animatedly as we walked along, their brisk voices dissolving the village's tranquil atmosphere. When meeting farmers they knew returning from the fields, shouldering a hoe or herding an ox, they always looked at one another and laughed. We walked on a winding trail they had built on the mountain. On either side stood houses built on columns, which were known as "high-leg houses". The two-storey houses are made of wood and the roofs are covered with tiles. The people live on the upper floor, while the ground floor is for raising chicken and oxen. Most of the girls had been to school. Many young women had chosen to work in Thailand, but the greater part preferred to stay home and help their families.

Though they wore long, tube-like skirts and I wore blue jean pants, I was always left behind. They seemed to climb a ridge in no time. Soon they began to introduce me to their way of life.

Belief in Buddhism

Besides the primitive belief that everything has a

1. The kindhearted Blang women always wear a smile. (by Li Zhixiong)

2. The Blangs' storehouses are built close to their village but away from the grassland to protect them from brushfires. (by Li Zhixiong)

3. Two Blang women offer grass bundles at a spot where Nan San Piao's horse is believed to have fed. (by Li Zhixiong)

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1. Like the Dai, the Blang men tattoo their bodies to keep demons away. (by Xu Yunhua)

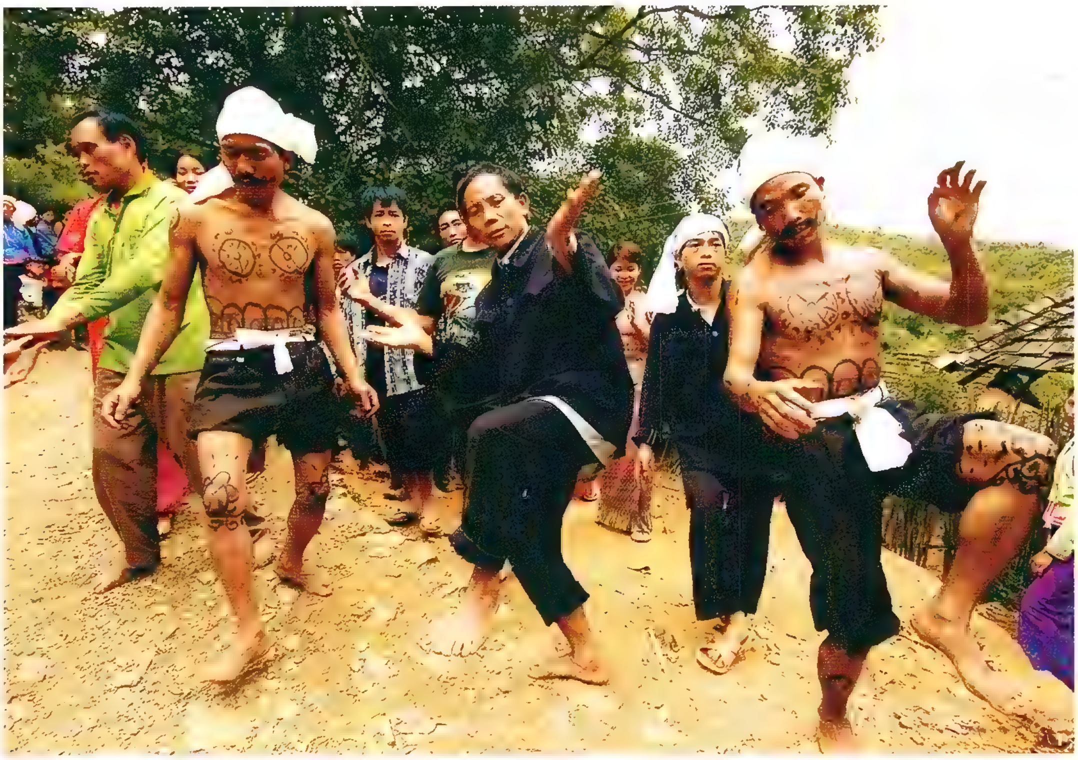
2. The Sutra Library in Zhanglang Village where this monk stays is said to be more than 1,000 years old.

3. The Blang light Kongming lanterns (also known as "Heaven's Lantern") and make a wish. (by Xu Yunhua)

4. "Painted teeth" are a unique custom of the Blang. Adult women paint their teeth black with areca mixed with limestone and the branches of young chestnut trees. (by Xu Yunhua)

5. At a grand religious event, Blang villagers act out a Buddhist story. (by Xu Yunhua)

6. This headdress, in the shape of three tops, commemorates Nan San Piao, the legendary local beauty.



soul, the Blang also follow Mahayana Buddhism. Almost every village has its own temple. When a boy turns 10, he goes to the temple to live as a monk and learn the Thai language and study. The monks are highly respected by the villagers, who also provide their living expenses. I asked the girls to take me to the village's 1,300-year-old temple. Built on an open area not far from the village, it consists of a modest Buddhist pagoda, a main hall and a sutra tower. The sacred statue of Buddha is seated in the centre of the main hall; sutra streamers hang on the walls. Inside the hall, several dozen villagers and young monks were reciting sutras. The hall was dark but for the light from some oil lamps. I could not

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understand a single word, but I felt peaceful in a way I never had before.

Evening came. Seeing we were all tired after the long journey, Yu'nan'er invited us to her home. We followed her along a dark road, the dense clusters of twinkling stars above our only light. From a distant hill came the rhythm of Buddhist sutra chanting. The high monk of the temple chants through loudspeakers every evening. The sound echoed in the village, over the hills, giving a sense of security.

A Modern Nan San Piao

Nan'er's home was a typical Blang-style structure with a fireplace in the centre of the spacious living room. A wooden board separated the bedroom from the living room. There is a balcony for drying clothes in the open air. Nan'er's parents did not know much Han Chinese. They were shy around me, a stranger, but they kept graciously serving me tea. The father, Yanzhang, had tattoos on his arms, which is a custom of the Blang, who believe the images can help drive away evil spirits and illness. Yanzhang said he had been to Thailand when he was young and now his oldest daughter was working there. They grew rice, corn and tea, and had bought a motorcycle. He was very satisfied with his life. The mother, Yu Zhang, was pretty. I asked Nan'er to ask her if she'd had many suitors when she was young. She smiled but did not answer. She wore her hair coiled on her head and covered it with a black scarf. She also wore earrings and bangles. When asked if she knew the story of Nan San Piao, she pointed to the three hairpins in her hair, the same decorations worn by every Blang woman in memory of Nan San Piao.

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Nan'er and I talked a great deal before I left. She was curious about the outside world and kept asking what it looked like. I did not know how to tell her; it seemed impossible to explain the complicated world in such a short time. I asked her to give me her address so I could write to her, reminding her to let me know if she ever moved. Nan'er said firmly, "No, we won't move. We'll stay here for ever."

At the village entrance I waved goodbye to the girls who had accompanied me through the day. The colourful clouds in the sky had all gone. But I would always remember the legendary story and the beautiful girls in the ancient Blang village.

Looking for Descendants of Nan San Piao

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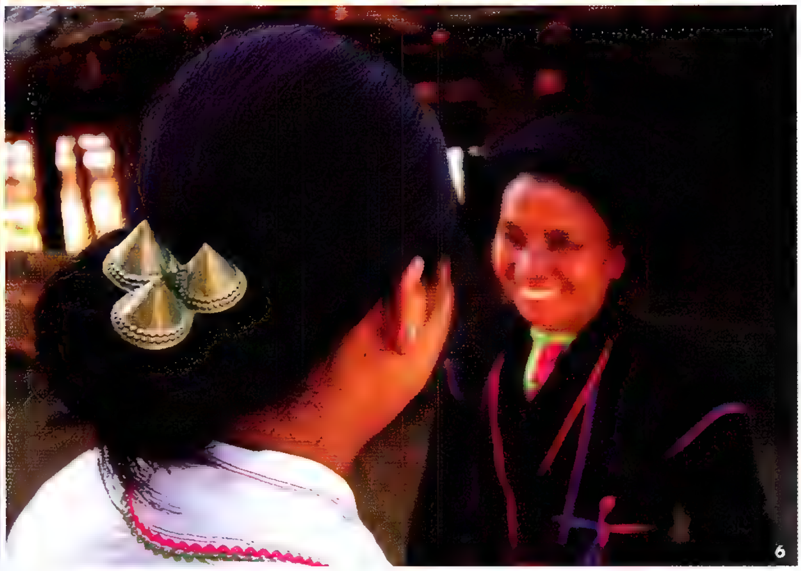
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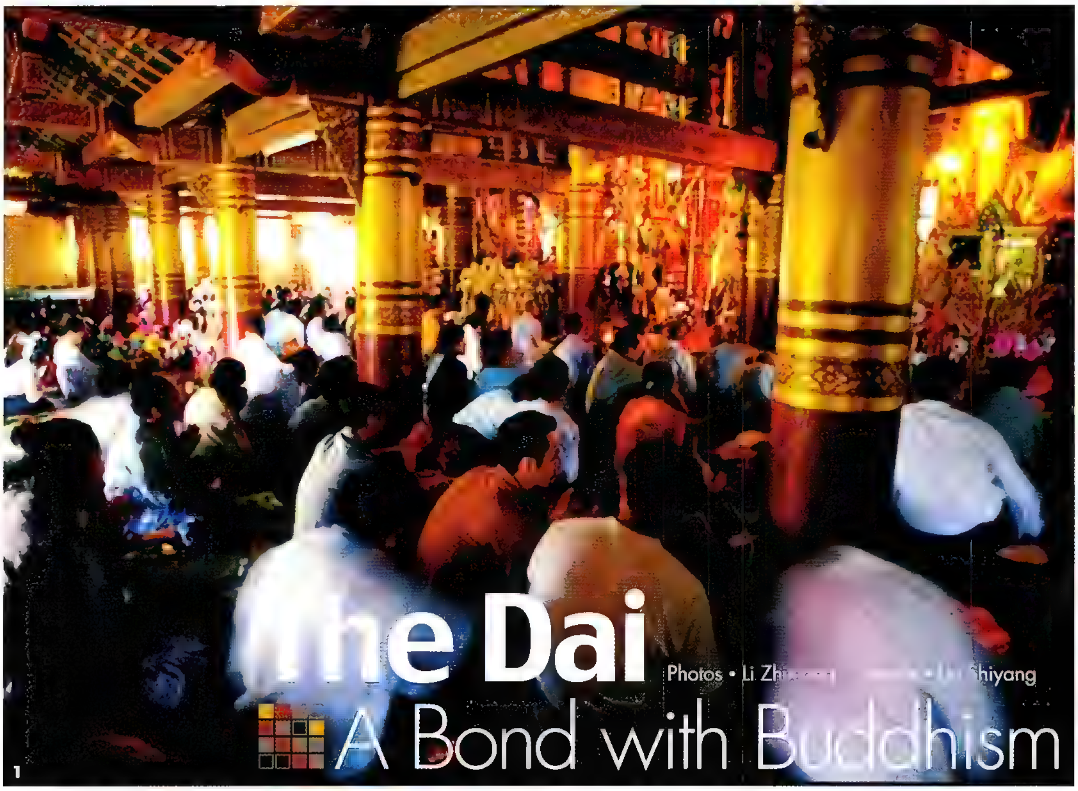


The Dai

A Bond with Buddhism

Photos • Li Zh[illegible] [illegible] Shiyang

As believers in reincarnation, the Dai of Xishuangbanna make donations to Buddha throughout their lives. If their present life is good, they believe it is the result of donations made in previous lives. So they continue to give for their own benefit, for later generations and for their future selves.

Numbering more than 300,000, the Dai form a major ethnic group in Xishuangbanna. They follow Mahayana Buddhism. On the 15th day of the sixth lunar month, they hold activities to make donations to the temple. After this day, they make another contribution every seven days. In the largest such activity, they present sutra books, called "dantan". In preparing their offerings, followers ask people skilled in calligraphy to write good wishes and auspicious words for them. After a high monk chants for them, they present the gifts to the temple. All temples in Xishuangbanna conduct such activities. Tourists can witness a wide variety of donation rituals throughout the year.

Gifts include all kinds of everyday things: instant noodles, toothpaste, toilet paper, towels, soap, garments, cucumbers, cooked glutinous rice and so on. But for the locals, every item has a specific purpose beyond its practical use.

Drumming Up Good Luck

Of the offerings given by members of the 108 families in Manchunman, Yanbing's donation was the most peculiar. He presented the temple with an elephant-foot drum.

When we arrived at Yanbing's house, we saw many elephant-foot drums scattered on the ground in front of the bamboo structure. The drums resemble giant cups, the tallest being a metre high and the shortest, about half a metre. I asked why he had given the temple a drum. He said it had been determined according to his birthdate.

When a Dai baby is one month old, the family asks a kangming, or retired high monk, to tie a thread on the infant's wrist. Meanwhile, his birth time is recorded on a piece of brocade the size of a human palm. This record will remain with its owner all his or her life. After death, it is cremated together with the body. If a person falls ill or suffers bad luck, he or she can take the birth record to a bozhang, the senior monk in charge of the temple. He reads the record and works out how to solve the problem.

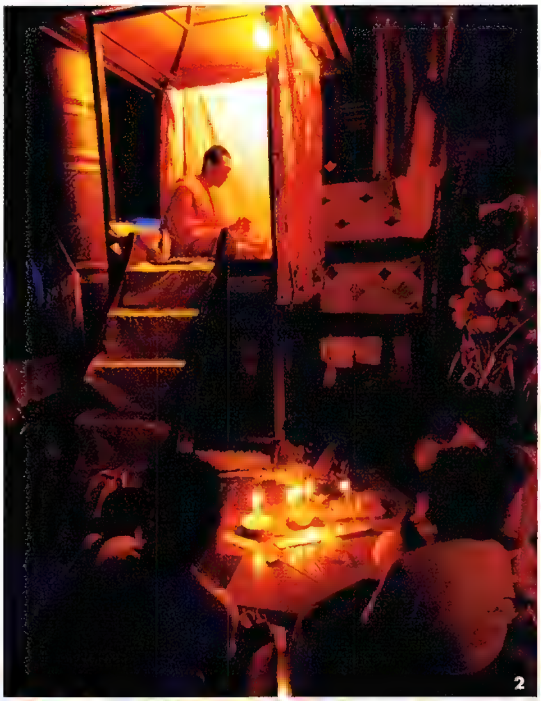
Yanbing, 47, had been hospitalized two years earlier. He was not recovering, even after spending thousands of yuan, and said he was dying. A bozhang studied his record and told him to donate a drum to the temple when he turned 47. In addition, he was to release an animal into nature immediately. According to Dai custom, when someone is ill or encountering great difficulties, he should ask a bozhang to chant for him and then release a fish into the river, or a bird or chicken into the forest. Yanbing invited the old man to tie a thread on him and then he freed a little bird. Consequently, he recovered. Preparing the drum donation had been on his mind ever since.

In interpreting the birth record, the bozhang said Yanbing would have good luck after the donation—he would have his own business, live a safe and peaceful life, and things would go smoothly for him.

Donations for the Future

As I approached Manting Temple, Buddhist chanting seemed to float towards me on the air. Yannuo and Yixiang, an older couple, were among those offering donations. They feared the younger generation would not give offerings on their behalf after they died, leaving them to suffer from poverty and hunger, so they made their own contributions while they were still alive. "If you don't make donations in your own lifetime, you will not have anything to eat in the next life and your children will be poor," they said.

The Dai are cremated after they die, and no tombs or tablets are erected in their memory. On the anniversary of a person' death, relatives and friends make a donation to the temple on their ancestors' behalf. Yanhua, another follower, was making an offering for his grandmother, who died the previous year. He had prepared many tributes. A bonfire blazed in the centre of the square, its vigorous flames springing towards the sky. In the past, Kongming lamps (a bit like hot-air balloons) made by the Dai would be released. The practise is forbidden today.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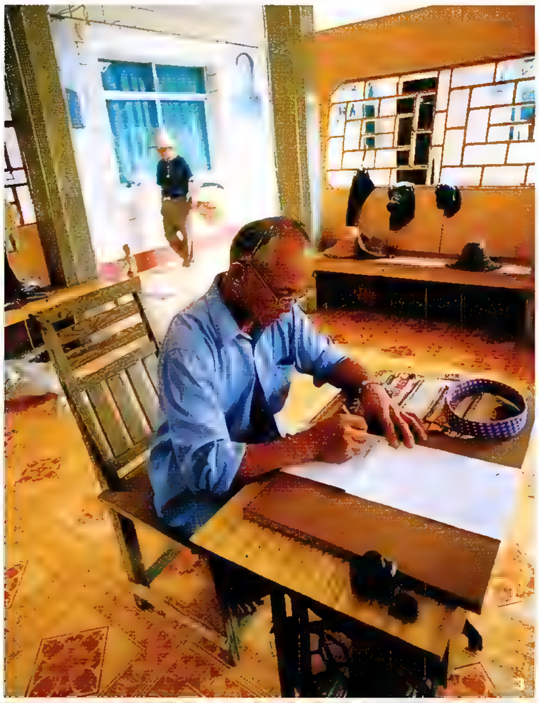
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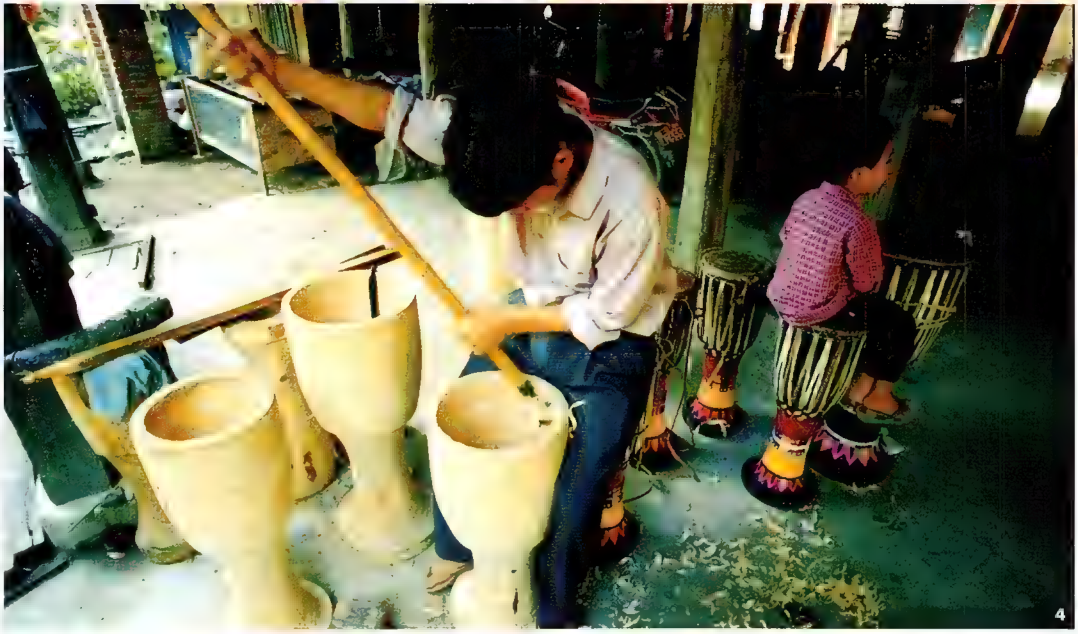
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1. All of the temples in Xishuangbanna conduct Buddhist activities. Tourists can see all sorts of religious rites performed throughout the year.

2. During worship, a high monk will explain certain religious rules or doctrines and how they affect the lives of the Dai people.

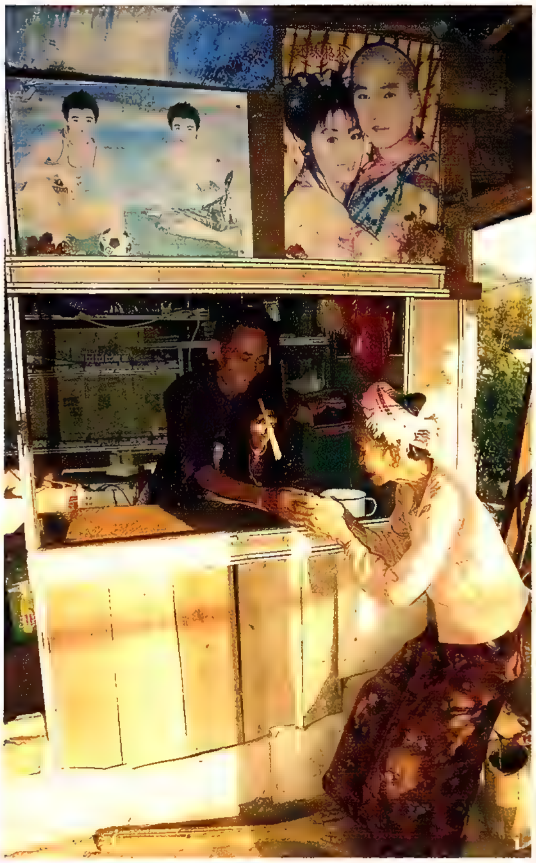
3. Sutra copying is part of the preparations for a "dantan" ceremony.

4. Yan Bing makes elephant-foot drums. Many villagers come to buy his work.

Other Tribes...

Apart from the 13 established ethnic groups living Xishuangbanna, there are many other lesser tribes that have not yet been recognized as individual ethnicities. Their identity cards categorise them as "Kemu", "Kongge", "Laopin" or "Bajia". The populations of these smaller tribes range from several hundred to several thousand.

The Kemu



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Fewer than 3,000 Kemu live in 18 villages in Jinghong and Mengla. They are a branch of the Khmer, as is their language. The average Kemu can understand about 70 percent of what a Cambodian says. They have primitive beliefs and many strict taboos. Due to their varied background, the Kemu of Mengla County are divided into two sub-groups, the Kemu and the Kami. The former group have their roots in Xishuangbanna and a long history. The tribe once established a kingdom at the foot of Tianfeng Mountain, where the Moxie Salt Plant stands today, and they dug wells for salt. The spring water of Moxie is said to have a high salt density. After digging a well, they fetched out the water and spread it in the sun until it dried leaving the salt behind. That was how the ancient Kemu earned their living.

The Kami, who live in the villages of Nanqian and Kami, are said to have emigrated from Laos. There are 52 households in Nanqian. The village head, Yanshuang, said that like some other ethnic minorities in the area, they, too, were born from a burnt bottle gourd. The first to emerge, Hani, was blackened and covered with ash. Embarrassed by his filthy state, he went up into the mountains to stake his claim. Kemu emerged next. He was also covered in ash and shyly made his home on the mountain, too, where he farmed. Dai, the third man to emerge, was clean, so he chose to farm on the scenic flatlands.

1. Beside their bamboo house, Yan Luan and his wife built a mat shelter from which they run a small store.

2. The Kemu and other tribes are said to have been born from a gourd.

3,4. Bajia children look forward to meeting visitors.

5. The Laopin all live in Manpin Village under the Manhong Villagers' Committee in Mengzhe Township, Menghai County.

The Bajia

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Some 1,000 Bajia live in Upper and Lower Nadong, Mandao and Hejiang under the Mengkang Villagers' Committee in Meng'ar Township. They have their own language and native costume, and their beliefs are also primitive. The Bajia costume includes a large black scarf wrapped around the head, a short coat buttoned in the middle and a wide skirt. Their clothing and language are close to the Dai, who live in red-brick houses in the mountains. When the Bajia speak, their pronunciation is softer.

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The Bajia's ancestors originally lived in Gengma and Shuangjiang in Lincang Prefecture. During the warring years, they moved to Jingbo in Mengar Township. As the villagers were organized according to the bao-jia system at the time and the families of eight *jias* (an old unit to measure the number of households in a settlement; one *jia* is made up of 10 households) had moved together, they became known as the Bajia.

The Laopin

The more than 200 people in the 52 families of the Laopin ethnic group all live in Manpin Village under the Manhong Villagers' Committee in Mengzhe Township, Menghai County.

Yanwu, a man in his 30s, knows how to read and write and speaks several languages, including Laopin, Dai, Lahu, Hani and Han. He once spent a month in Thailand. Some of the ethnicity can be found in three Thai villages and there is also a tribe in Laos. Through extensive research in all three countries, experts have written a book, the first book the Laopin can read in their own language.

Yanwu thought the "Lao" of Laopin might indicate their Laos origins, although "Lao" also means "old" in

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Chinese. With such a small population, when the young village women leave to work in the outside world, they usually marry men of other ethnicities. Few return to their birthplace. Young men, however, tend to stay here and farm.

Manpin Village holds a sacrificial ceremony for the Mountain God every year and every villager attends. Grain seeds are placed in the temple and everyone gathers in front of the temple to listen to their tribal leader read sutras passed down from their forefathers. They pray to the Mountain God for happiness, safety and a bountiful harvest. Apart from the New Rice Festival and the Torch Festival, the Laopin also observe the Dai New Year and the Han Spring Festival. Every household has a shrine to the ancestors. During the Spring Festival, before the New Year's Eve dinner, they burn incense and present dishes and wine to their ancestors and ask for protection.

The Kongge

1. A Laopin farmer grows grain and raises ducks in the same field.

2. A simple L-shaped bamboo stick is used by the Kongge to remove husks of rice.

3. Yan Jian of the Kongge tribe has sat public exams and nearly qualified for university.

Kongge Mountain 30 km from the town of Mengyang in Jinghong City is the home of the Kongge ethnic group. The fewer than 2,000 Kongge live on the mountain. Their one- and two-storey houses, and the railings that they clutch as they climb, follow the contours of the slopes.

The Kongge, who used to refer to themselves as Hu, are thought to have come from somewhere inland (or possibly Liangshan Mountain in Sichuan). The story goes that most of the group crossed the Lancang River and headed on to other countries, but some of them missed the departure because they were too busy cooking fresh-caught crabs. They stayed in Xishuangbanna, where the Dai called them Kongge, literally meaning "missed" or "delayed". Eventually, the Hu adopted this name.

Kongge people wear Han clothing most of the time, but for festivals or weddings they don traditional ethnic costume. In the past, they only married within their own tribe, but recently inter-ethnic marriages have become acceptable. According to Buddhist records, they once inhabited the luxuriantly forested Qima (Horse Riding) Mountain. They ploughed the land with knives and or used fire to clear it, but they rarely raised enough to feed the tribe for a full year. Eventually, they moved to the foot of the mountain and began reclaiming land to grow rice.

The Kongge follow primitive religious rites. They also believe that everything has a soul, but they are not Buddhist. When they hold sacrificial ceremonies, they usually kill an ox, which is provided by each village family in turn. It's a major event and all the villagers come to see the slaughter. Afterwards, every family gets a share of the beef.

The Kongge believe they descended from Three Eyes, who was said to be extraordinarily clever and gallant, as well as triple-sighted. He is a hero and a god worshipped by the Kongge people.

Translated by Gloria Shang

Tips for Touring Xishuangbanna

White Pagoda Park in Xishuangbanna (stock photo)

A tropical botanical garden (by Chan Yat Nin)

Sheng Tai Le Bar (by Xu Yunhua)

Kong Ming Mountain (by Xu Yunhua)

Rafting on a river on Kong Ming Mountain (by Xu Yunhua)

Transport

Air:

Daily Flights from Shenzhen to Kunming are available, and a ticket costs about 1,100 yuan. It takes 45 minutes to fly from Kunming to Xishuangbanna; the fare is 700 yuan. You are recommended to buy a package ticket of Shenzhen-Kunming- Xishuangbanna, which may cost less. It costs 30 yuan to take a taxi from the Xishuangbanna Airport to downtown Jinghong; it needs 5 yuan for a medium-sized bus.

Land:

Bus: From Jinghong South Bus Station, Jinghong Bus Station and Xishuangbanna Bus Station, there are long-distance buses running to other prefectures of Yunnan. The bus driving between Kunming and Jinghong is available every day, and it needs seven hours and 145-170 yuan for the journey.

From the Jinghong Bus Station, you can go to county seats and townships such as Nuoshan, Mengyang, Menghan, Mengla and Daluo. The fares range from 9.5 ~ 45 yuan. The schedules for different terminations vary between 6:20 ~ 18:30.

Jinghong South Bus Station: The Tourism and Vacation Area

Jinghong Bus Station: 23 Jinghong North Road

Taxi: The starting price is 5 yuan, and the cost may be enough for driving in Jinghong's urban district, as it is not a big city.

Sea:

Sea route from Jinghong Port to Thailand was opened a couple of years ago. From Jinghong, passengers can sail to Chiang Sen in Thailand. The journey takes about 10 hours and the fare is 600 yuan, but it's not scheduled, so you need to call 139 88175506 for information.

Climate

Xishuangbanna has rainy and dry seasons. From April to October, temperatures keep at 22°C and higher; From November to March of the next year, temperatures are around 13°C. The difference between daytime and night temperatures is big, so you need to care about your clothing.

Accomodation

Crowne Plaza Hotel:

It is composed of a group of Dai-style buildings.

Add: Jinghong Tourism and Vacation Area Tel: (691) 212 8888

Dai Garden Hotel:

It is a luxury hotel occupying the largest area in the city.

Add: 61 Minhang Road Tel: (691) 212 3888

Golden Banna Hotel:

It is situated by Manting Park and Ethnic Cultural Garden.

Add: Jinghong Tourism and Vacation Area Tel: (691) 212 4901

Tiancheng Hotel:

It is close to a bookstore provided with reference books concerning Yunnan and Xishuangbanna.

Add: 28 Gasa Road Central Tel: (691) 215 6888

Scenic Spots

Kong Ming Mountain Scenic Area

Kong Ming Mountain is the highest peak of one of the six major Pu'er tea producers, it is also a newly developed scenic area in Xishuangbanna. In this tourist zone 60 km from the city of Jinghong, one can visit Kong Ming Mountain, and ancient Bodhisattva Temple, Great Grass Mountain and ancient tea plantation. One can also choose to attend the thrilling activity of river floating or follow the trail to see natural tropic scenes and rain forest. Camping ground and hotels are provided in the area.

Website: www.bnkms.com Tel: (691) 2128 823

Other Attractions:

Manting Park, Wild Elephant Valley, Ethnic Cultural Garden, Tropical Botanical Garden, Xishuangbanna Dai Garden, and Jingzhen Bajiao Pavilion.

Food

Fresh fish roasted in wrapper, chicken boiled with sour bamboo shoots, pork cooked in bamboo tube, and fish roasted with lemongrass.

Dongnanyuan Restaurant:

Characterised with Yunnan-style cooking and comfortable environment

Add: 10 Development Area Tel: (691) 215 3668

Nameng Hot Spring Holiday Village:

It offers stylish dishes and natural hot springs.

Add: Jinglong Highway, Gasa Town Tel: 130 35978038

Yiyouxuan Restaurant:

It provides charming scenery as well as local dishes.

Add: Menghai New Road, 17km post Tel: 137 59252376

Shawanli Restaurant:

It is characterised with Thai-style dishes.

Add: Beside the Qingren Bridge on the old Airport Road;

Tel: (691) 135 78128057

Shengtaile Restaurant:

It is provided with live performance by the most popular band in Xishuangbanna.

Add: Gasa Town, Jinghong City Tel: 135 78122996

Shopping

Apart from tea, coffee, medicinal herbs, jade, woodcut, handicrafts, you may also buy various cute ethnic souvenirs, such as bags, dolls, woven items, paintings, and you may even have Dai-style garments tailored.

Xishuangbanna Tourist Markets

The newly opened night market on Mengla Road: Opening time: 19:00-24:00.

Minzu Handicrafts Street on Jinghong North Road, beside Jinghong Hotel.

Xishuangbanna Travel Service

Provides overseas travel routes, including that from Xishuangbanna to Thailand, Myanmar and other countries.

Xishuangbanna China International Travel Service, Overseas Department

Website: www.lmrbt.com Tel: (691) 6723 638

Traditional Dai clothing (by Bulushou)

North to South in **Thailand**

We left Xishuangbanna for Thailand, the aptly named Land of Smiles. The people of Thailand and China's Dai ethnic group are said to have maintained innumerable ties in addition to sharing the Mekong River. Instead of just sunbathing on the beach, we chose to see a different Thailand.

1. At Chiang Mai's annual Flower Festival, Thai women welcome visitors with warm smiles. (by Li Zhixiong)

2. Located in the old "Golden Triangle" area, Chiang Mai, the second largest city in Thailand, has become a popular tourist spot. (by Xu Yunhua)

3. The woman in the mask owns a hostel in Chiang Saen. (by Li Zhixiong)

We had planned to leave Jinghong, capital of Xishuangbanna in Yunnan Province, by boat and travel along the navigation lane of the Lancang River (as this part of the river is called outside of China), which opened just last year. It would take at least 10 hours to reach Chiang Saen in northern Thailand. From there we would drive to Phayao, Chiang Mai, Ayuthaya and Bangkok, and then back to Chiang Rai in the north. Finally, we would leave Thailand from Mae Sai to return to Myanmar.

We had high expectations for the trip. But after we boarded the ship, the No 8 Golden Triangle, at 9 a.m., our departure was delayed due to heavy fog. It was up to luck now. Most of the other passengers were from northern Thailand, though the rest were Chinese tourists from Xishuangbanna or tea and clothing tradesmen. Most of the Chinese people on the boat could speak fluent Thai. The Thais did not seem too worried about the delay; some even started singing karaoke as soon as they were on the boat.

Guanlei Port

China's Last Port

We eventually set sail but it was slow going with frequent stops. We arrived at Guanlei Port, the last port of China, at 12 noon and went through the exit formalities. The No 244 boundary marker for China, Myanmar and Thailand was just 20 km away. Many merchant ships were birthed at the port and workers were busying hauling goods around. Though simply equipped, Guanlei is a vital Chinese port with an annual handling capacity of about 150,000 tons. With the exiting procedure completed, we left

Guanlei Port, saying goodbye to China and entering the Mekong River.

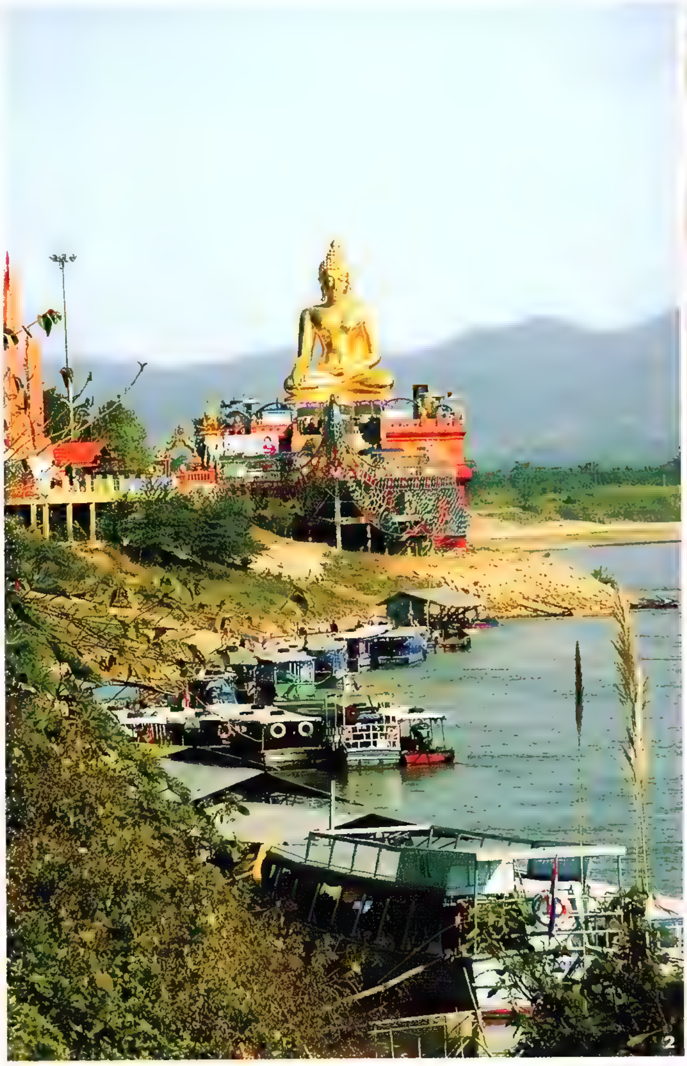
From Jinghong in Xishuangbanna to Chiang Saen in Thailand we would sail 347 km. Trees cover the hills on either side of the river, the vast green broken up by the occasional house. Villagers herding oxen on the hillside made for picturesque scenery. The houses, similar to those we saw in Xishuangbanna, must have been built by ethnic peoples living in the border area. Whenever anyone, adults or children, saw the ship approaching, they stopped herding or fishing and gazed as it passed by. Some children waved to us and shouted. I was surprised that they were so interested in the ships and people floating past.

Chiang Saen

The Quiet "Golden Triangle"

We arrived at Chiang Saen at about 10pm, the trip having taken five hours longer than usual. I was told that public order was extremely good in Chiang Saen and that the prison was empty. At the time I doubted this, but once there I was convinced. The driver affixed our luggage to his rack without covering or locking it. Looking around, we noticed that all the Thais did the same. Our worries seemed needless. At the inn where we stayed, I once accidentally left the key in the door but my luggage remained safe and sound within. So, empty jails and a lack of crime are possible. Here was the proof.

Early on our first morning in Thailand, we were awoken by a recitation of Buddhist scriptures. The chanting, which came from a small Buddhist temple near our hotel, permeated the place with a sacred atmosphere. Walking along the quiet, beautiful road in Chiang Saen dressed in our summer clothes, we felt very relaxed and cheerful. We passed signboards advertising the "Golden Triangle" in several languages complete with maps and pictures. Eventually we came upon a large Buddhist statue recently erected near the Mae Sai River. Inviting coffee houses and souvenir shops sat nearby. According to one information board, "Chiang Saen had once been wholly destroyed by Rama I, because he feared an invasion by Myanmar at the time." I was surprised to learn the sad past of Chiang Saen.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1. The Thai in Ayuthaya like posing for pictures in traditional Chinese clothing during China's Lunar New Year. (by Li Zhixiong)

2. The Flower Festival is a feast for the eyes: pretty flowers and beautiful women. (by Li Zhixiong)

3. In Phayao, some transplanted Xishuangbanna Dais have opened an exhibit of their former lives in Yunnan, China. (by Bulushou)

4. A traditional Chinese opera, Thai-style. (by Li Zhixiong)

Phayou

Looking for a Dai Village

After leaving Chiang Saen, we drove to Phayou, 155 km away. The national highway was lined with coconut, palm and banana trees and our car was bathed in tropical sunlight. When we were in Xishuangbanna, someone told us there was a Dai village in Phayao and we wanted to see it.

We turned off the highway down a narrow winding path, occasionally passing villagers on motorcycles. To prevent sunburn, they wear veils that cover all but their eyes. We constantly stopped people to ask the way to the Dai village, but we kept getting lost. It was taking too long and the temperature was more than 34°C; we nearly gave up. But we kept on driving until we came to some villa-style houses. They did not look like Dai houses, and if the villagers themselves had not told us it was in fact the Dai village of Bantat, we would have passed right by.

Banna Is My Hometown

Bantat, the hub of Thailand's Dai ethnic group, has 252 families made up of 820 people. Sqijan, Potjana and Manot, three villagers we got to know, were very pleased when they heard we had come from Xishuangbanna and didn't even ask why we were visiting them.

They were fourth-generation residents. Their forefathers fled to Thailand 150 years ago from Menglibang Village in Xishuangbanna to escape roving bandits. The early immigrants moved from place to place at first, stopping in Ten County, then in Kengman County of Chiang Rai and eventually in Phayou's Kengkham County. Later they found this pleasant spot where the two rivers meet. As it was lush with tall ancient trees and a Buddhist stupa had already been erected there, they settled down. I could see the Dai influence everywhere. The 100-year-old Sonin temple stands at the centre of the village. This is where religious ceremonies, traditional sacrifices and peace blessings are conducted. The present abbot is already the 28th generation. The villagers also observe such traditional Dai festivals as the Water-Splashing Festival, complete with gala costumes and decorations. What moved me most was the attempt to preserve Dai history and culture and pass them on to younger generations. A Dai-style wooden house had been specially built and stocked with typical furniture to instruct youngsters about the daily life of the Dais in the past. The villagers also planned to build a Dai village along the Mae Sai River as a further historical exhibit. The respect and reverence for their ancestral home was ever-present.

"We are eager to go to Xishuangbanna to see where our forefathers lived," said one villager. Before we left they planned to organize a large-scale visit to Menglibang, Xishuangbanna to fulfil this long-held wish. We could imagine how excited they would be to see their native soil.

Chiang Mai

A City that Never Sleeps

Leaving Phayou that evening, we drove to Chiang

Mai, the second largest city in Thailand. We arrived at about 3 a.m., but the bars were still open and pop music could still be heard. It's obviously a popular holiday spot for foreigners.

Fortunately, we were just in time for Chiang Mai's annual flower festival. The festival, one of the most important events in Thailand, started 30 years ago. It is held every February when the flowers are in full bloom. Carts decorated with scores of blossoms rolled along the parade route, with flower "sculptures" depicting everything imaginable from Buddhas to elephants. Girls dressed in Dai-style sarongs and wearing fresh flowers in their hair performed traditional dances. Some participants carried bowls of water, which they splashed at spectators. It was just like the Water-splashing Festival in Xishuangbanna.

Visitors to Chiang Mai must see Wiang Kum Kam, the ancient city ruins. According to historical records, this royal underground city was one of the prime witnesses of the culture of the Lanna Kingdom. The first capital to be destroyed by the flood and buried for more than 200 years, it lay undiscovered until the ancient Buddha was unearthed at Wat Chang Kham.

Ayuthaya

Farewell to the Fairy Tale

Next we went to see the remains of the Ayuthaya (meaning "peaceful city" or "big city") Kingdom, the second kingdom founded in Thailand after the Sukhothai Kingdom. With a history of more than 400 years, it stretched over a large area that included Myanmar, Angkor in Cambodia and Laos. At the height of its power and splendour, Ayuthaya was an almost mythological metropolis, much larger than even today's London or Paris, and extremely prosperous. Intrigued by its forest of Buddhist pagodas, I visited four important temples in Ayuthaya. The town resembled an old man who had experienced too many of life's hardships. The grass-covered Buddhist pagodas, their worn stone carvings and the broken heads of the Buddhas on the dilapidated walls looked forlorn. Thais like to pray before the broken walls and the Buddhist pagodas by placing some osmanthus flowers in front of them and holding their palms together. But the once bustling city was desolate.

When we were told it was the last day of the spring festival ceremony for sending off the city god, our melancholy lifted and we went to see how the Thais celebrate their new year.

Spring Festival with the Thais

The spring festival celebration for sending off the gods covered two full streets. Vendors had set up stalls selling clothes, souvenirs, toys, shoes and

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more, reminding me our lunar New Year's Eve night market. One stand taking pictures of visitors attracted a lot of people. We saw several young men dressed in traditional Chinese New Year's clothes taking people's photos against a wall displaying couplets and some New Year decorations. Noticing the Chinese characters on their clothes, I asked them whether they knew what they meant. They did not know any Chinese at all and talked to us in broken English: "Photo? 150 baht. Happy!" Then we noticed some Thais burning joss sticks and offering sacrifices. Operas were performed on a small stage; we watched "Fox Pays a Debt of Gratitude." The performers seemed well trained, but we could not understand what they were singing or whether it was in Thai or Chinese. Nevertheless, it was a lot of fun.

Bangkok

Home Is Anywhere

We were told that one-tenth of all Thais lived in Bangkok and that 90 percent of the nation's cars were registered here. Urban traffic not withstanding, we visited the Great Royal Palace as planned. Within the exquisite building, all we could hear were the loudspeakers of tour guides: "Chinese tourists this way, please. Don't get left behind!"

We were told that Chinese shops had once operated on the site of the palace but were moved to another area by order of Rama I. The area they relocated to gradually became today's China Town. When our car turned into a large street we saw Chinese signs for the Grand Chinese Hotel, the Oriental Hotel and so on, and scores of Chinese people as well. Walking along the street I was reminded of Hong Kong in the 1960s. In addition to Charoen Krung, Yaowarat and Sampeng, the three main avenues, there were many smaller crisscrossing streets packed with pharmacies, moon cake shops, pawnshops, and cured meat and fish shops bearing names such as Suchengxing, Chengxingli, Chenghexing or Chenbaoxing, all of which mean "flourishing business". I entered a hardware store and soon learned that the owner, Yan Guang, came from Xishuangbanna. When he first came here he could not speak a word of Thai. During the daytime he went around carrying a heavy a bag of metal wares on his shoulder looking for buyers; at night he would study a map to memorize the streets. Now he not only speaks Thai like a native but is also a rich man. He said, "The

1. A street in Bangkok's China Town. (by Xu Yunhua)

2. Once a bright empire, the former site of Ayuthaya is now bereft, with just a scattering of Buddhist stupas and statues as a reminder. (by Xu Yunhua)

3. The face of Sakyamuni is carved at the foot of a giant banyan tree. (by Xu Yunhua)

Thai people were not used to the hardships that eventually provided me with a good opportunity for my business." Chinese people can always make their homes where there is a chance for them to develop.

Mae Sai

Ahead to Myanmar

We calculated that we had driven about 836 km from Chiang Saen to Bangkok. So inevitably we saw a great deal of Thailand by car. Sometimes, tired of the scenery, we slept for a while. But when we turned back to Mae Sai in the north, I became excited; soon we would leave the coconut trees and bright sunlight of Thailand for Myanmar.

We drove all night to reach Mae Sai, a small town separated from Tachileik, in Myanmar, by a river. About 100 metres from the border, Mae Sai has a well-developed border trade with many stores selling jewels, souvenirs, watches, socks and more lining the streets. Some of the shops are run by Myanmese. At night when the stores close, they walk back home. Many tourists like to exit Thailand here to get a look at Tachileik. We bid goodbye to Thailand here, too, and said hello to Myanmar.

Translated by Wang Zengfen

3

Tips for Touring Thailand

Transportation:

Scheduled flight

Scheduled flights from Hong Kong fly to Bangkok everyday. There are flights from Xishuangbanna to Chiang Mai and Bangkok every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, about 1,100 yuan to Chiang Mai and 1,600 yuan to Bangkok.

Sea route

Ships from Hongjing Port of Xishuangbanna, China to Chiang Saen of Thailand are available and it takes one day.

Climate

There are three seasons in Thailand and from March to June is the rainy season with a temperature from 28 ~ 36°C. It is slightly cooler in the northern part of Thailand.

Currency: Bahts, one Hong Kong dollar converts 4.9 bahts.

Time difference: One hour slower than Hong Kong.

Languages: Both Thai and English are widely used.

Accommodation: Generally the family-style hotels do not provide slippers, hair-driers, or hot water, while some of them may be equipped with air-conditioners and TV sets. The rate differs from 200 to 600 bahts.

Shopping

Special souvenirs

Handicrafts, Thai silk, antiques, furniture and so on.

Chiang Mai night bazaar: It is a large-scale market in northern Thailand covering several streets. The most local and economic way is to take a "tuk tuk" (a special tourist mini-van of about 6 seats decorated differently to attract tourists) to there, so that you may enjoy the breeze on the way.

Water market in Bangkok

There are many water markets in Thailand. Damnoen Saduak market, about two hours' drive from Bangkok, is a nice one for you to experience living on water of the Thai families and at the same time you can buy some special souvenirs. It is about 1,300 bahts if you take a taxi from Chinatown. Opening hours: 0900 ~ 1200.

Chatuchak Market: It is the largest flea market in Bangkok which sells family utensils, handicrafts, flowerpots, various birds and animals and paintings as well. It usually opens from Wednesday to Sunday. You can take the skytrain railway and get off at Mo Chit Station.

Chiang Rai night bazaar

It is small in scale than the one in Chiang Mai. Still, you will be feasted by lots of products. Besides, their prices are almost one-third of those in Chiang Mai market.

Recreation

Koh Samui

People who visit Thailand have to go to the beach. Koh Samui, the third largest island of Thailand will be a nice choice. The island owns many beaches such as Lamai and Chaweng. At the same time you can enjoy some activities on water and climb mountains as well. You can also travel around the island by renting a motor-bike, about 200 bahts for one day. There are some restaurants with rich emotional atmosphere which provide nice seafood. With HK$200 you can enjoy a big meal nice food with shrimps, fish and crabs and go to the bar at night, offering all night service, to drink to your hearts' content. In addition, there are various kinds of hotels, wooden houses, ordinary ones and luxury ones with a nice view of the sea with the prices varying from 500 to 5,000 bahts, so you can choose the one you like.

Visa

People who have BNO or visas of SAR enjoy 30 days exemption of visas.

The Golden Triangle No 8 (Jin San Jiao) boat to Thailand (by Bulushou)

A snack store in Ayuthaya's market (by Li Zhixiong)

Koh Samui (by Li Zhixiong)

Lost in Time in Myanmar

Tachileik, Kyaing Tong and Monywa: these were the three cities I planned to pass through on my journey through eastern Myanmar. Monywa is just two kilometres from the Daluo customs office in Xishuangbanna, China. Formerly within the infamous Golden Triangle, this area is now under the administration of the Shan State. The Shan, said to share the same ethnic background as the Dai, is just one of Myanmar's many and diverse ethnic groups.

With the departure formalities approved at the northernmost Thai city of Mae Sai, we headed straight for the border. The two countries are literally linked by the Friendship Bridge spanning the eight-metre wide Mae Sai River. Modern buildings flank both banks, yet just a stone's throw away is another world entirely. The national flags of both countries fluttered either side of us as we approached the gateway, which bore the words "Union of Myanmar".

Tachileik

First Impressions

Just inside the border crossing was Tachileik, a bustling trade hub. Tachileik is from the Dai dialect, with "ta" for ferry and "chileik" for the lignum vitae (literally "wood of life") tree, a tropical evergreen said to be the hardest wood known to man. The Mae Sai River is renowned for its bounteous reserves of lignum vitae, though I did not see any.

Our guide was a Myanmese—Chinese who spoke the local language, Mandarin, Dai, English and Thai. An amazingly bright blue sky arched over the street, which was peppered with buildings just two to three-storeys high. We could breathe amongst them, free from the suffocating feeling that clusters of city high-rises create. The time here is half an hour behind Thailand, but in the real world, it seemed even slower and soon I was not conscious of the minutes passing by.

We took a tourist coach along a few of the main streets. The border trade in Tachileik was just as active as that of Mae Sai, with goods from Myanmar, China, Thailand and other countries continually changing hands. Among the circulating currencies were Myanmese kyat, Thai baht and Chinese RMB. People dressed simply. Most of the women wore sarongs, or "longyi", and they looked quite stylish, even while carrying heavy loads on their heads. Both the women and children sported a white, powdery makeup, a facial cream made from the bark of a scented tree. What mysterious sylphs! Apart from a couple of billboards advertising "Myanmar Airways" and "City of the Golden Triangle" in English, I couldn't

read a thing. The kids playing in the streets smiled welcomingly at us. When the coach passed a school, I grabbed up my camera intending to take a few quick pictures. But the guide stopped me, nervously saying that no one in uniform, including soldiers and students, could be photographed. Only then did doubts about this otherwise idyllic place creep into my mind.

Under Surveillance?

We checked into the Chinese-run Mekong River Hotel. From atop the ten-storey hotel we had a bird's-eye view of Tachileik. Gilded stupas, Buddhist temples and lowly huts and bungalows spread out before us, an endless mass of vegetation as a backdrop. Perhaps there was still an opium poppy out there, I joked. But the guide scolded me: "Don't say such things in public!"

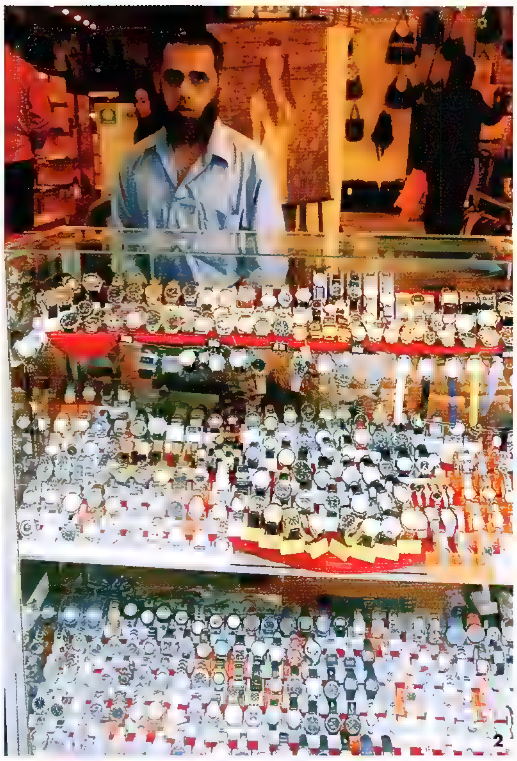
Tachileik was once the distribution hub of the Golden Triangle drug trade. It is said that even today more than 180 of the state's intelligence units are still stationed in town. Any building, hotel or room could be a secret base manned by agents from all over the world. Any place might be wiretapped or under close-circuit TV surveillance. Anybody could be a spy, and anyone else, a suspect.

Soon I was checking the curtains, the carpet... anything at all in the room once I returned each day.

To the Land of Buddha

Thus warned and taking greater care, we headed for Wan Pung, some 20 km from Tachileik. Wan Pung is in the heart of the Golden Triangle. The road to the town was rocky and puddle-strewn. In the past, it was banked by sprawling poppy fields. Now the cash crops are coffee, corn and sugar cane. On the way we passed through the Dai village of Wan Tong Burhah. Villagers there were celebrating the first anniversary of the community temple, and rituals were being held. Small children were also being prepared for monk-hood. Myanmar is a Buddhist country, following Theravada Buddhism. The males are supposed to serve as monks at least once during their lifetime. The little monks were just six years old dressed in yellow kesa, or the Buddhist cassock. They stood ready to go through one of the rites of passage. Like the offerings the Dai people make at the Danfo (donation to the Buddha) Festival, the sacrifices were fairly practical—mineral water, washbasins, Thai baht—and everything else imaginable. The villagers had also erected a stage for music performances. The familiar Dai songs reminded me of my visit to Xishuangbanna just across the border in China.

Long Lone Temple in Wan Pung is famous for a stupa that has been under construction for 28 years and is not yet completed. The temple has cost a

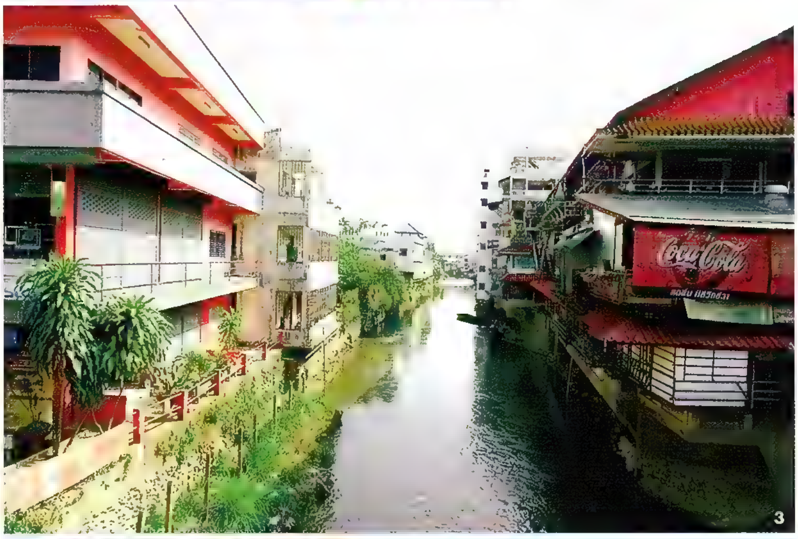


1. Tachileik, a city on the outskirts of the old Golden Triangle area, has very few tall buildings. (by Li Zhixiong)

2. Some of the products at the Tachileik market come from China, including handicrafts, ornaments, wallets and watches. (by Li Zhixiong)

3. The Mae Sai River separates Mae Sai in Thailand and Tachileik in Myanmar. (by Li Zhixiong)

4. One can walk to Myanmar over the Friendship Bridge. (by Li Zhixiong)

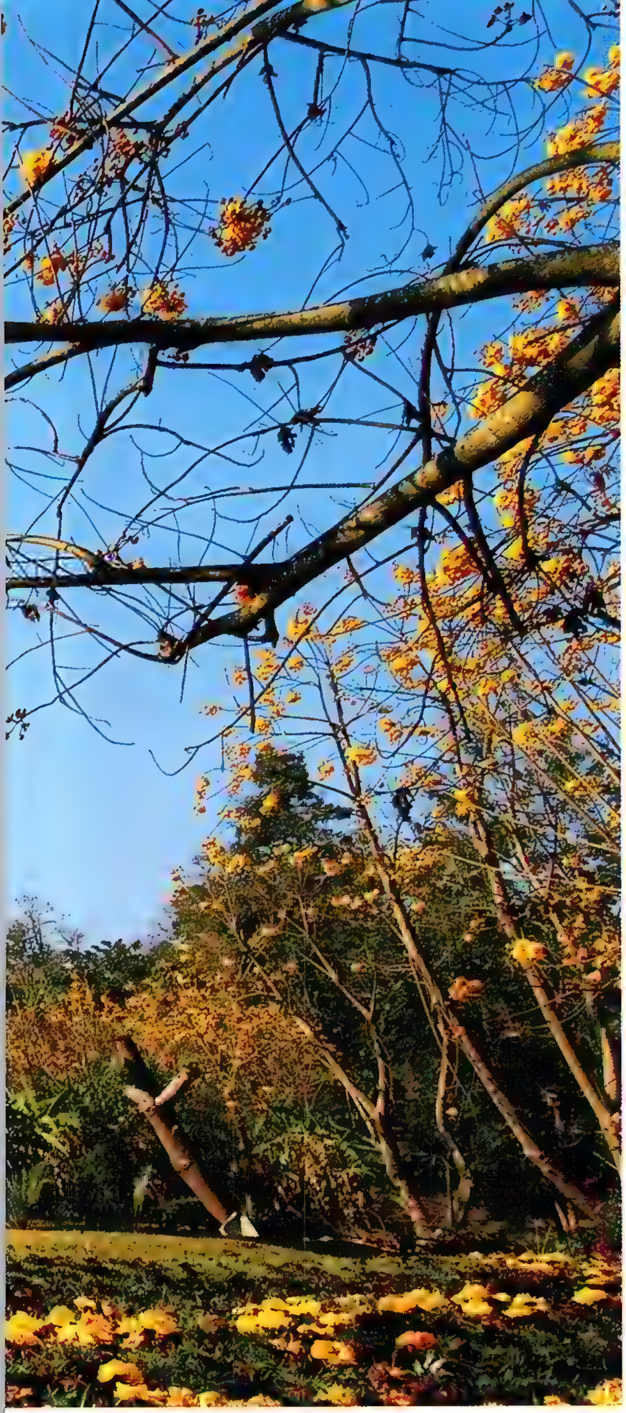


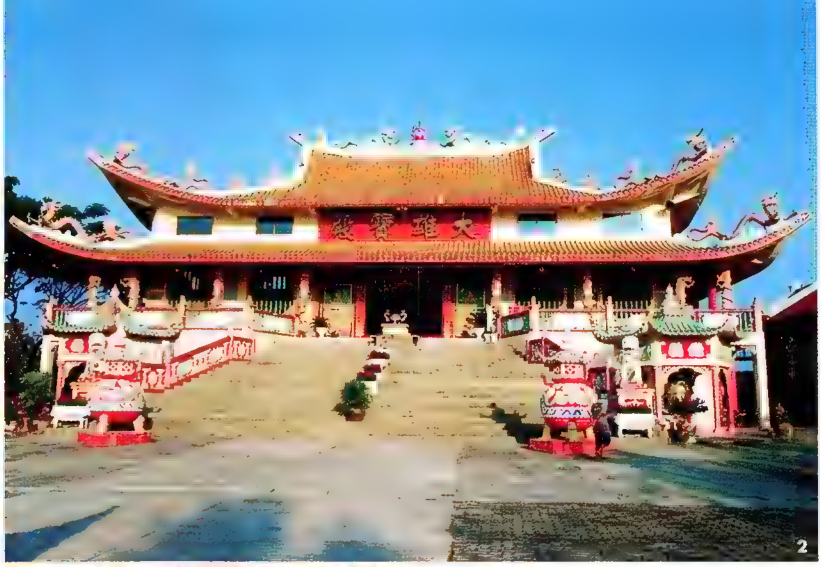
fortune already; the vault alone took 14 years to construct and the pillars were made of materials specially ordered and shipped from Japan. With over 100,000 Thai baht lavished on it, only half the temple was done. Statues from India are worshipped there, while scenes from Buddhist stories decorate the walls. A young monk patiently explained each story, increasing my understanding of their moral significance. On the way back, we were treated to a rare sight near the former house of a living Buddha of Myanmar: dozens of bright yellow flowers surrounded a stupa. The guide, too, was amazed by the blossoms. He said the lotus bud flower, which brings good luck, only grows in places where there is a living Buddha. In the past, poppy flowers dominated the mountainsides. Now this golden flower signified Buddha's realm. On this land, it seemed everything, including the flowers, were in a karmic cycle of evil and goodness.

No Beer, No Passage

After a quick visit to Tachileik's market and the village of the long-necked Karen people, I came across an interesting hall in a Buddhist temple. It was actually a school. According to our guide, state policy did not allow Chinese schools to operate, so the Chinese here would first establish a Buddhist temple, under the shelter of which they would then conduct classes. The young nuns here would learn sutras from the temple's masters and Chinese from masters from Taiwan and the China mainland. When they had learned all they could at the temple, they could seek further study in Taiwan.

We were to go to Kyaing Tong, 164 km away, next. But before departing, the driver and the guide loaded crates and crates of Yunnan-brewed Red River (*Hong He*) beer into our vehicle. Shortly after driving through the toll gate, we noticed a camouflaged cabin. We thought it must be a military bomb shelter. A row of bungalows stretched along one side of it. If not for the





1. Beside the Mekong River in Myanmar territory, golden flowers blossom all over the mountains. It is said that only in a peaceful Buddhist land can such a scene be viewed. (by Xu Yunhua)

2. The main hall of Tachileik temple is not only a religious place, but also a study room. (by Bulushou)

3. Children in Myanmar are supposed to serve as monks at least once in their life; the youngest among them is not yet six years old. (by Xu Yunhua)

word "Immigration" on the wall of the cabin, I would never have realized it was the township checkpoint.

At the first checkpoint, the driver got out, unloaded one crate of beer and placed a stack of documents on top of it. The officer looked at the beer, smiled at the driver and started stamping the documents. So that was what the beer was for. Over the next hundred kilometres, I counted 11 checkpoints. At times the checkpoint was but a "gate" of string, while at other times it was a proper administration building. But at each stop, our driver presented a crate of beer and his humble smile. Occasionally, he would first reach his hand (cupping a sum of money) out the car window to the officer. How much? It all depends, apparently.

We reached the last checkpoint at 6 p.m. The uniformed Myanmese soldiers glanced at us and waved us through. I had been expecting something special, but nothing exciting happened before we arrived at Kyaing Tong.

Magically Religious

The guide called Kyaing Tong the economic and cultural centre of the eastern Shan State. I thought it had a special charm. The shops were small, the streets clean and quiet. A few young monks begged for alms at the roadside. Long ago, from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, a city kingdom stood at Kyaing Tong. Together with the ancient kingdoms of northern Thailand, Xishuangbanna, Laos and Vietnam, Kyaing Tong formed a larger kingdom called Yonaka. The place is also rich with religious stories from down the ages.

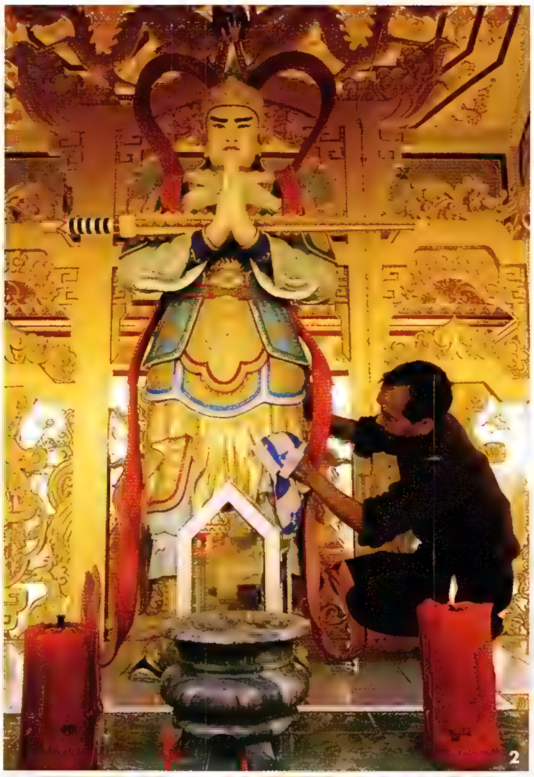
The Standing Buddha at Kyaing Tong is well-known. Apparently, several centuries ago a missionary dug up some treasures, and soon after some local villagers became very sick after taking some of the booty for themselves. As recompense, they built the Standing Buddha, which resembled an excavated statue of the Buddha, at the site. In the open land behind the Standing Buddha, however, stand the Catholic Santa Maria Church, a Christian school and several buildings of the British colonial style. It seemed miraculous that these buildings, well over a hundred years old and of such different religious faiths, were standing in harmony with the Buddhist structures.

Monywa

A Very Chinese Border Town

Monywa, two kilometres from the Daluo customs office in China, was the last leg of our journey. The road to Monywa was fair, comparatively speaking. The only problem was there were no lights along the road. I felt lost and I still don't know how the vehicle got us there. I had heard earlier that Myanmar was short of electricity and blackouts were normal. But from the experiences of the past few days, I'd also learned that nothing was impossible if we kept trying.

This border city under the administration of the fourth special zone in the eastern Shan State was a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miniature China. Its Chinese shops, the billboards advertising mobile phones, and the Chinese characters of the neon signs dazzled the eye. "Made in China" seemed to be stamped on every item for sale, and our mobile phones could access China's mobile network. Even the TV channels in the hotel were Chinese. It was home away from home. In the early morning, I went to the wildlife market where elephant hides, crocodile and boa skins, and other strange things, were on offer. Mandarin, not Myanmese, voices filled the air.

After we looked at the Anti-drug Memorial Hall and the Myanmar-China Friendship Stupa, the driver took us to the border crossing. The guide returned my passport, and I had no trouble passing through customs.

On the way to Jinghong, the capital of Xishuangbanna, I opened my passport to find discover that my Myanmar visa had been stamped with an entry date but no departure date. The lower part of the visa read, "Land route not permissible", meaning that overland entry and departure were not allowed. In that case, was I still legally in Myanmar? Or was my journey lost in time...

Translated by Zhang Boli

1. Monywa in Myanmar and the Daluo Port of Xishuangbanna in China are less than 2km apart. (by Li Zhixiong)

2. Over 80 per cent of Myanmar's population is Buddhist. (by Li Zhixiong)

3. Nuns plant vegetables in the back garden of the 100-year-old St Mary Abbey in Keng Tung. (by Li Zhixiong)

4. Charming Nongdong Lake in Keng Tung. (by Xu Yunhua)

Tips for Touring Tachileik, Kyaing Tong and Monywa

Entry and Departure

Both BNO and SAR passport holders need to apply for visa. Currently Myanmar has two international ports, Yangon and Mandalay international airports. The visa that specifies "Land Route Not Permissible" indicates that overland entry and departure are not permitted. Usually individual application for visa will be placed in this category. According to the official web site of Myanmar (www.myanmar.com), overland entry into Myanmar requires a valid Border Pass. Border Pass holders can enter Myanmar at Tachileik and Kyaing Tong, or at border checkpoints along China-Myanmar border of Muse and Mong Lar.

Website: www.myanmar.com/Travel/Before%20you%20come/index.html

Visa

The Consulate General of Myanmar · Hong Kong

Add: 2401~2436 Sun Hung Kei Centre, 30 Harbour Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong
Tel.: (852) 2845 0810/ 2845 0811 (Mon. to Fri.)
Visa processing time: 1 working day Fee: HK$150
Documents required: 3 colour photos, photocopy of passport, and company certification of vacation

Climate

Myanmar has three seasons: the hot season from March to May (30°C); the rainy season from June to Sept (25°C); and the cold season from Oct. to Feb (20°C).

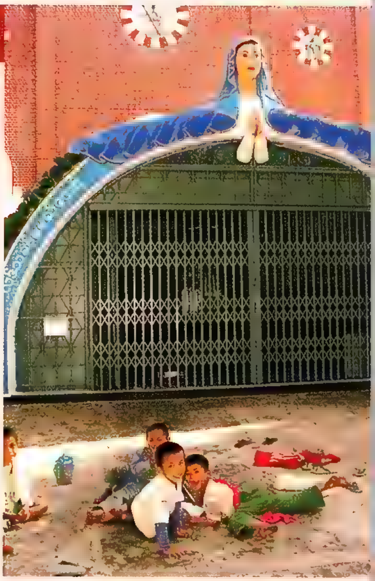
Currency

The Myanmar, Thai, and Chinese currencies are circulating in Myanmar. It is not convenient to exchange Hong Kong dollar locally. It is suggested to keep some Thai baht before leaving Thailand for Myanmar. The Chinese currency Reminbi is acceptable, and is exchanged at the rate of about 1 yuan to 13,000 kyats.

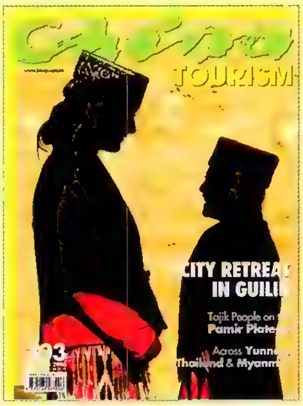
Time Difference: 1.5 hours behind Hong Kong Time.

Accommodation

Among the many hotels in Tachileik, some of them are run by Chinese. But Kyaing Tong has poorer lodging facilities. It is suggested to stay overnight in Monywa where there are more choices of hotels. The room rate per night is about 80 yuan.



Outside a Cathedral in Keng Tung (by Xu Yunhua)



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China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

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Discoveries: Farewell Steam Train	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Highlights: Xuzhou Historical Relics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Landscapes: Three Times to Mt Sanqingshan	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
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Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

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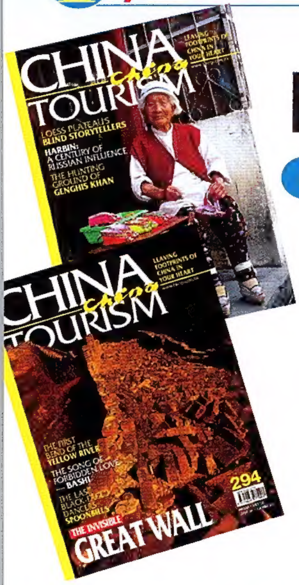
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FEATURE STORY:

Religious Huangnan Prefecture

Penetrating into the rocky peaks of the *danxia* landform of Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in eastern Qinghai Province, you enter a mysterious religious land: ancient temple of the Tibetan Buddhism, prayer scripts waving along the banks of Longwu River, statues and drawings of Buddha, gods, evils, etc. At local traditional festivals, you will also have a feast of beautifully dressed people, riding races, and martial arts competitions. Welcome to explore with our correspondent…

Nature:

Source of Northern Pearl River

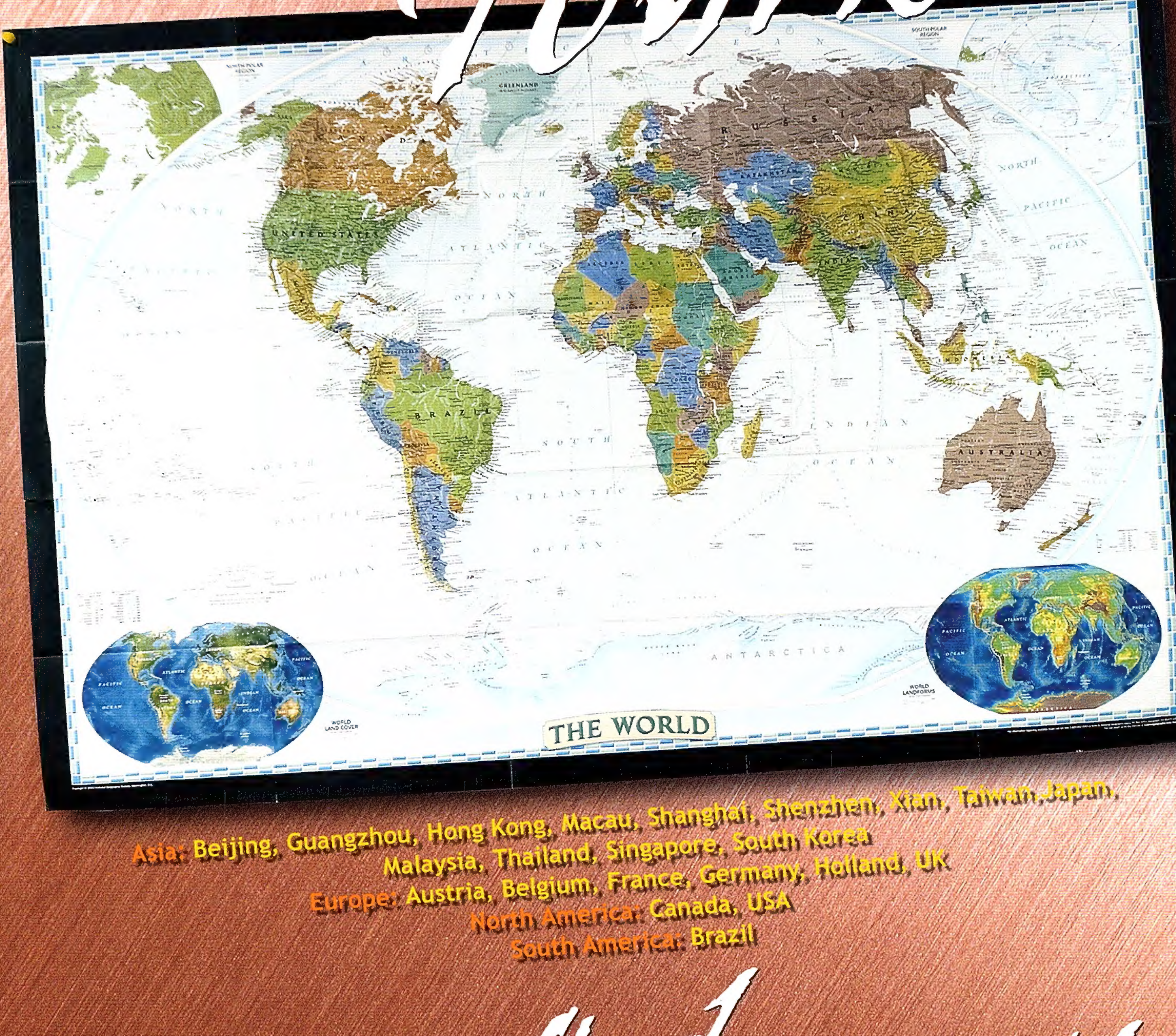
The well-known Pearl River is composed of three main streams flowing from the east, west, and north, thus forming the most complex water system in China. Our reporter leads us to travel along the Beijiang (North River) of Pearl River originated from the Nanling mountain ranges in Central and South China.

City Snaps:

Yan'an — the Red Capital

Yan'an in Shaanxi Province might be one of the most barren places in the world. Yet, it is always shining with a single history since it was where Chairman Mao Zedong of the Chinese Communist Party had lived for 13 years. As a tourist, you will feel interesting about its "Red Culture", but our reporter also tells how the cityscape of Yan'an is rapidly changing.

China Tourism



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